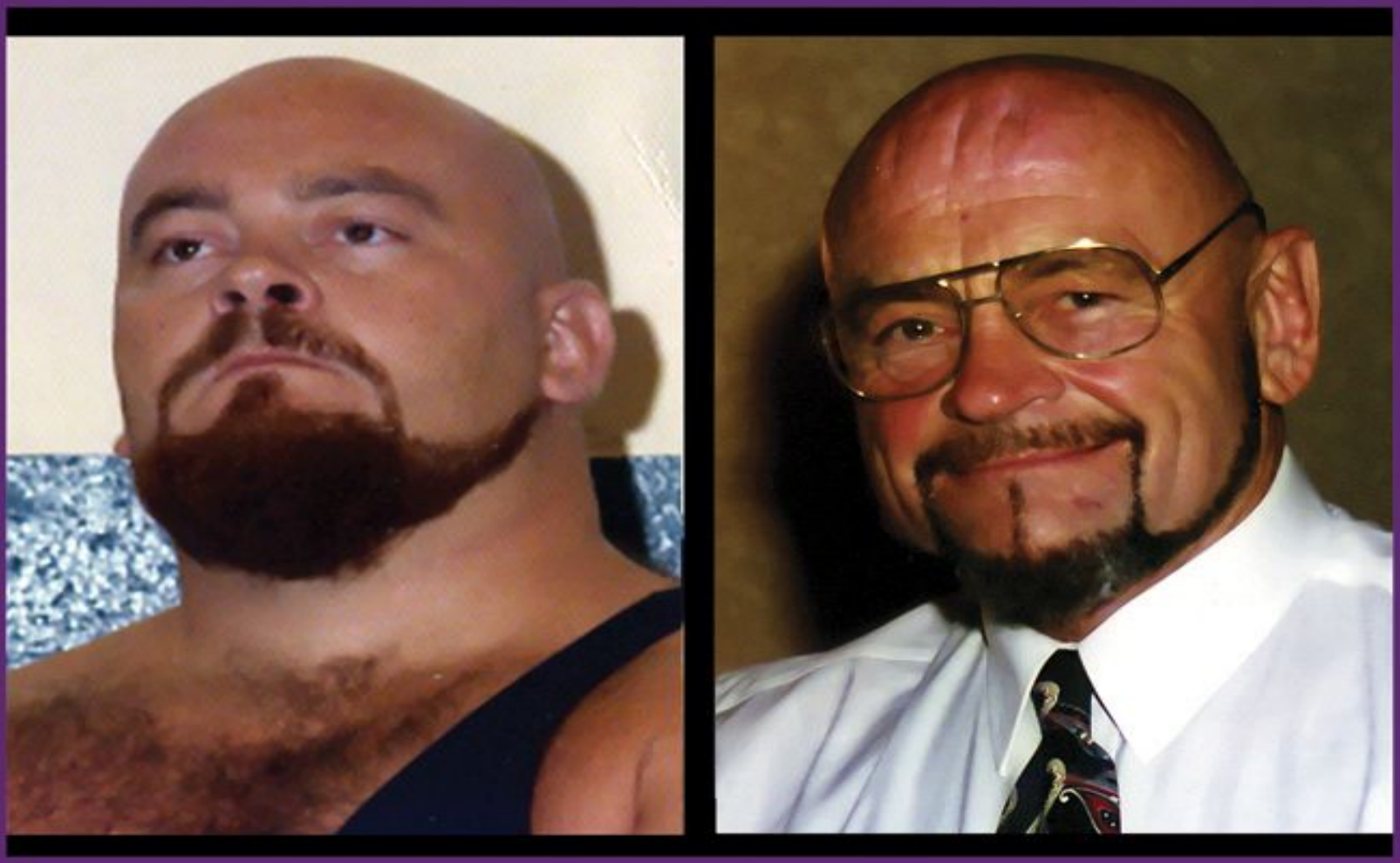
"Is That Wrestling Fake?"

The Bear Facts



By Ivan ★ Koloff

with Scott Teal

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Acknowledgements

As I try to put my feelings about my life in wrestling into words, it seems like it must be somebody else that I’m writing about. Call me a mark, but being a small man in size, and coming from such a humble background, I feel so fortunate to have had so much success.

Sometimes I wonder what I’ll be when I grow up because everything has passed by so quickly. Life is so short, and yet it has been so good to me. There are many things I would have done differently, but as they say, hindsight is 20/20. I made many mistakes, but that’s life.

I have so many people to be thankful for, and all of my friends know that I love and appreciate them. There are many more than I can mention, so if I don’t mention you, please don’t be hurt. As far as I know, I don’t have any enemies—only friends.

I would like to thank many people for their contributions in my life. First of all, I thank my God and Savior for his patience and mercy. He has allowed me to still be alive and in good health, after 40 years of abuse from life in the ring and on the road.

Thanks to everyone for this blast called wrestling, especially my fans. It doesn’t matter if you loved me, or if you wanted to rip out my guts. I appreciate your love and support of the business when you bought your ticket. If it weren’t for you fans, Ivan Koloff would have been just another Canadian struggling to make a living.

I’m thankful to the people who invented television, which is the medium by which I was first introduced to the sport we know as professional wrestling at the young age of eight.

I am thankful for my mom, for encouraging me to follow my dream and calling me "My little wrestling champ."

Also, I thank my brothers for all of the rough wrestling matches we had on the farm. The fact that you showed me no mercy made me tough. Actually, that's T-U-F-F tough.

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Foreword

This is a shoot story, much like the shoot interviews being taped and sold today. The primary difference is that I prefer to tell the negative stories about myself, instead of knocking everybody else. If you anticipate reading gossip stories about other wrestlers, then you will be disappointed. I do talk about other wrestlers, but in the context of how their lives intertwined with mine.

This book is not intended to be a knock on today's wrestling product. I don't like a lot of what I see today, but I have come to the conclusion that wrestling today is simply a different product from what it was years ago. And since I wrestled for over 40 years, I think that qualifies me to voice my opinion on those differences.

For the most part, wrestling in the 1800s was the real deal. The champion at fairs and carnivals would have to defend himself within a certain time limit "against all comers" that answered the promoter's challenge over a loud speaker. From what I understand, there were rules such as: no fists, no eye gouging, no hair pulling, no biting, and no hitting below the belt. I'm sure there were a lot of tough guys who wanted to accept the challenge to "rassle." One of the most famous wrestlers to accept this kind of challenge was Bruno Sammartino, possibly one of the most famous professional wrestlers of the '60s and '70s.

Bruno told me that when he came to America, he started working out hard in weightlifting and conditioning. One day, he saw an advertisement for a fair that said, Anybody who can stay in a cage with an orangutan for "X" number of minutes will receive $200 prize money!

Bruno needed the money, so he accepted the challenge.

Bruno told me that it was the worst fight he had ever been involved in. For such a small animal, it was not only fast, but very strong. Bruno managed to

stay the time limit and win the prize. However, he said his clothes were torn apart and he had bruises all over his body.

As the years went by, wrestling promoters saw the advantage of controlling the matches and deciding who they wanted to be champion. The promoters would allow the wrestlers to determine the moves and spots they used in the match, but the promoters determined who would win or lose in the end.

The job for the wrestlers was to work hard and have a great match, in the hopes of filling the building with paying customers for return engagements. The wrestlers made more money when they were in the featured match [main event], and there was a great deal more money for the world champion, especially when the attendance was high.

Professional wrestling has been called many things over the years—rigged, fixed, predetermined, planned, and even fake. Whatever you want to call it, pro wrestling featured some of the toughest athletes ever. Those athletes were proud of their skills and weren't always willing to just lie down in the middle of the ring and allow themselves to be pinned. In some cases, contrary to the wishes of the promoter, they pinned their opponents, or embarrassed them in the ring by showing up their lack of wrestling skill. At other times, the wrestler might do what the promoter asked, but after the bell rang, they continued their match in the dressing room.

For the last fourteen years, I have been on the road doing autograph signings to promote Children's Miracle Network. Wrestling fans approach me and often ask, "Now tell me the truth. Is that wrestling fake?"

That's a question that nobody dared ask before 1990. My answer is always the same.

"No."

If time permits, I explain that according to State Athletic Commission rules, wrestling is defined as an exhibition, which is commonly defined as, "a sporting event in which there is no gain or loss from whether the competitors are victorious or not in the competition."

Plain and simple, it’s entertainment.

Evel Knievel is a daredevil motorcycle stuntman who performs stunts such as flying in the air over a number of stationary cars and buses. Kneivel practices his stunts ahead of time and knows exactly what he is going to do. The fact that he does that, however, does not mean that what he is doing is fake. It simply means that he is an entertainer who works hard to perfect a craft for the benefit of an audience. As a result, he has broken almost every bone in his body.

There have been many wrestlers who have permanent disabilities today due to injuries suffered in the ring. During my career, I have had two broken shoulders, a broken left ankle [four times], two ruptured discs in my back, torn biceps and triceps muscles, cracked ribs, teeth knocked out, and dozens of stitches. I have had arthroscopic surgery performed three times on my left knee.

There is nothing fake about any of that, so, if you think wrestling is fake, you are wrong. The best explanation I ever heard came from my friend, Randy Savage, when he said, "Everything you see in the ring really happens."

Chapter 1
Scaffold Match

I was born on August 25, 1942 on a farm in a small town near Chrysler, Ontario. Chrysler is located about 20-30 miles north of Massena, New York, towards Ottawa in what they call the Nation River Valley. With the help of neighbors' wives, five of us were born right there on that farm.

My parents' names were William and Blanche. With ten children—seven boys and three girls—and no more than a fifth or sixth grade education, they just about had to live and work on a farm in order to feed us all. They had little education, but they were hard-working people. Believe me, on a farm, there was a lot of work to do.

I remember one thing about the farm quite well. When we were babies, Mom would put us outside on the porch in our cribs. Evidently, there were a lot of snakes in that part of the country. On several occasions, Mom came outside to check on us and found a snake in our crib. They didn't bother us. They just wanted to curl up next to our warm bodies and lie in the heat of the sun.

My brothers and sisters, from oldest to youngest, are: Philip, who died of cancer at age 43. Next is my oldest sister, Leona, then Roger, both of whom live in Alberta, Canada. The next youngest was Raynald. We called him Raymond, or just Ray. I was next in the pecking order, then Morris and Bob. Bob died in a car wreck when he was in his early 20s. He was drinking and was killed instantly when he drove off the road. Jerry lives in Alberta near Red Deer. My youngest living sister is Jean.

Jarmaine, who had been the youngest, died at age 18 from an overdose of drugs. It was a suspicious death because she was involved with people who dealt drugs. We think she was going to testify against a drug pusher and somebody force-fed drugs to her to keep her quiet. The sad thing is, the same thing is still happening to kids today.

Like ours, the majority of the farms in Canada were dairy farms. Farming was a tough life, and our parents needed our help. On a farm, once you were physically able to do certain jobs, and you knew how to do them, you were expected to do those jobs. When I was 7 years old, I was plowing fields and milking cows early in the morning. By the time my brothers and I were 10 years old, we were doing the work of full-grown men.

We would get up at five o'clock in the morning, in all seasons except winter, get dressed, and go to the fields to drive the cows back to the barn. Nowadays, you hear about kids not wanting to do chores, but on our farm, with three or four brothers at home most of the time, we were quite competitive.

Now that I'm older, I realize what a great psychologist my mom was. She would encourage us by turning our chores into a game. "Okay, who's going to be the first to get to the cows today?" We all wanted to get up before everybody else and be the first to get the cows, and in turn, get mom's attention. There always seemed to be a contest between us. I remember my older brother, Ray, climbing out the second floor window and shinnying down a rope in order to get a jump on the rest of us.

Farming was a good way to keep kids busy and out of trouble because there were plenty of chores to be done, but even though it was a hard life, I always loved living on the farm.

There was a short growing season in the summer, so we had a short period of time to take in the hay, re-plow, get the ground ready for the following year, and plant wheat. Wheat stayed dormant in the winter and started to grow in the spring. We also planted a lot of corn. We were just poor farmers, so we didn't have a silo where we could store the corn, so we just stacked it up in big piles and fed it to the cattle by hand, stalk and all. With 30 to 40 head of cattle to feed, we stayed busy.

In the summer, I had to bring the cattle in from the field and entice them into the barn with a handful of rolled oats, which they got once they went into the stable. It didn't take long before they knew they would get a treat, so they would hurry to come in. Most of the time, all we had to do was call them, and they would come running. Once they were settled in their stalls,

we would begin milking them. We didn’t have any fancy dairy equipment. We milked all 30 head of cattle by hand, then released them so they could go back out to the pasture.

In the winter, the cows were kept in the barn. They were let out for short periods of time during the day to get fresh air and exercise, while we cleaned the stables. There were more chores to take care of in the winter. During the spring and summer months, the cattle would eat the grass in the pasture, but when the weather turned cold, we had to bring the hay into the barn when it was time for them to eat. We also had more manure to clean up because the cows stayed in the barn. By the time spring rolled around, there was a mountain of manure outside the barn. We didn’t waste anything. We used the manure as fertilizer by spreading it in the field with a manure spreader.

When I was 5 years old, we moved to a farm between Chesterville and Winchester, which was also in the Nation River Valley. We lived right on the river, which runs from the northeast to the southwest, and stayed there until I was 12 years old. I never understood why we left the first farm, other than the fact that the ground was rocky and hard to plow.

The second farm was about 110 acres with about 100 acres of it cleared. We left the trees on the other ten acres because we needed the wood for the wood furnace that heated our house. We cut down trees, chopped the wood into small pieces, and stacked it up against the side of the house. That was quite a job because it took a lot of wood to keep our furnace going all winter. We also used the wood for fence posts, which had to be cut into the proper length and width, dried out properly, and treated against rot.

One of the misfortunes that hit our family on that farm was when our main barn burned down. We don’t know how the fire started, but we suspected that a hobo had been smoking and had accidentally set it afire. I was very young at the time, but I remember watching my Dad running into the barn to save the cows and horses. It scared me because it was really ablaze by the time he ran inside, and thick, dark smoke was pouring out. Dad didn’t come out immediately after the horses and cows ran out, so we were really worried. We were all crying, "Where’s Dad? Where’s Dad?"

Eventually, Dad crawled out on his hands and knees, coughing and hacking from smoke inhalation. What he did was smart. I don't know if it was instinct, or if he knew that smoke and heat rises, but he crawled out with his face close to the floor. He told us that the smoke was so thick in the barn that he couldn't breathe unless he crawled. He was lucky to get out when he did because the barn collapsed just minutes later.

We managed to save the big shed near the barn and converted it to a barn until we could replace the old one. We bought a barn from a nearby farm, took it apart, moved it piece-by-piece to our farm, and reassembled it. It was big enough to house about 25 milk cows. We got a lot of help from neighbors. In those days, neighbors would help out in times of crisis, or when it was threshing time, which is when we brought in the crops. In turn, our parents would send us to the neighbors' farms to help harvest their hay and corn. I can remember 30 to 40 people working on our farm during peak harvesting times. While we worked, we visited and talked, and Mom would cook for everybody. It was a good way to relate to the neighbors and get to know them.

I remember that barn well because my brothers and I spent a lot of time in the hayloft. We had a piece of equipment called a pick, a trolley-like device which rolled on wheels. We rolled the hay wagon underneath the pick and, using the hoist, dropped the pick into the hay. When the pick closed on a mound of hay, we used a horse and pulley to pull it up into the hayloft.

That wasn't what I enjoyed about the hayloft, though. My brothers didn't share the same enthusiasm about wrestling that I did, but we would all climb up into the hayloft and wrestle in the hay, pretending to be professional wrestlers. We would also stand on the 8x8 crossbeams and fight [which makes us the first people to engage in a scaffold match], and we would fall off without thinking about the danger. It couldn't have been any less dangerous than the backyard matches that kids have today.

During the winter, when there was just enough hay left to pad the floor of the loft, I would climb up into the crossbeams and practice my falls. I did flips off of the beams and landed on the hay. I thought it was the height that I would reach when I jumped off the top rope of a wrestling ring, but thinking about it now, I was probably ten or fifteen feet up in the air. I was

like most kids, though, and I didn't give any thought to the possible danger. As an adult, I realize now that the height might have been the lesser of possible dangers. If a stick or a board had been hidden in the hay, I could have seriously hurt myself. Of course, when you're a kid, you do reckless things without stopping to think about the possible danger.

When I was 9 years old, the hay wagon turned over onto Morris and buried him in hay. We panicked because we had to dig him out by hand. We couldn't use the pitchforks because we were afraid that we would poke him, so we got down like beavers and dug him out. We had to do it quickly because there was the possibility that he was suffocating. When we finally reached him, Morris was unconscious. He had hit his head on a rock and had knocked himself out. We rushed him to the doctor.

During that same timeframe, my parents sent me to live with an older couple who needed help on their farm. I did the work of a full-grown man. I was so homesick. One of the things I remember was that the lady didn't make fried eggs the way I liked them. They were undercooked and runny. I didn't like that, but I didn't say anything because I had always been taught to eat what was put in front of me. I was supposed to stay for a couple of months, but I couldn't wait to get out of there. I was so lonely and homesick that I begged my mom to let me come home. After a few weeks, she relented and brought me back.

We left the second farm because our new barn was about half the size of the original barn that had burned down. We made do with it for a couple of years, but it just wasn't big enough for our operation, so we moved to a farm about ten miles away near Finch, Ontario.

The only way that Mom and Dad could farm was to do something akin to sharecropping. It wasn't really sharecropping, but that's the closest thing I can relate it to. Sharecropping is when you give a share of the crops to the owner of the land in lieu of rent.

In our case, we couldn't afford to buy land or cattle. Today, people go to the bank and get a loan, but in those days, you didn't do that, so Dad struck a deal with a financially well-off man in Finch who bought milk cows at auction. It was a good deal for both parties. The man retained ownership of

the cows, but we were allowed to keep the cows on our farm. The man owned all male calves that were born, while we owned the females. That way, we had an ownership stake in the cattle we raised, which was almost a necessity because we ate the cattle almost as fast as we could grow them. It takes a lot of food to feed ten hungry children. We also gave the man a percentage of the milk that the females produced. If any of the cows died, he would replace them, and if a cow got sick, he would send a veterinarian to tend to it.

There was also another reason for the moves. As soon as we got one farm running well, we would make an offer to buy it. Each time we did, the land owner balked and said something like, "I don't want to sell right now. It might be a good idea if you moved on and bought a farm of your own." Each time, the land owner found a reason to get us to move.

When we moved to the third farm, the owner promised to sell the farm to us. After my dad worked hard and fenced in the good acreage, and got the land tilled and in good shape for planting, the owner changed his mind and sold the farm to a neighbor, who wanted to expand his farm. Our land was adjacent to theirs, so they offered the owner more than the property was actually worth, knowing that it would one day go up in value.

That happened several times. My Dad put a lot of sweat and tears into developing those farms, but each time, as soon as the farm was in top, working condition, the owner found a reason to renege on his promise to us.

If we had been able to buy the second farm, it would have cost a little more than $3,000. If we had kept that land, it would be worth $200,000 or more today, but that was 55 years ago and $3,000 was a small fortune. When I was 10 years old, my dad worked in a factory for less than one dollar an hour. He told me that a dollar an hour was a lot of money compared to what he made ten years before when he made a dollar a day.

I had my first taste of alcohol when I was 8 years old. In those days, we harvested corn two or three times a year. Everybody worked hard, so when we had an opportunity to have fun, we partied. Mom and Dad would invite their friends to the farmhouse for a family-type get-together. Somebody in the family would play the fiddle, or guitar, and everybody else would

square dance. The kids didn't know much about dancing. We just jumped around and acted like a bunch of hillbillies.

When you were 8 years old, and you did a man's work in the fields bringing in the crops, you were allowed to drink like a man. We weren't allowed to drink hard alcohol, but beer was available to us. I've met many people who lived in that era who said their Dad used to have shots of whiskey with them when they were teenagers, and many of them became alcoholics. I don't think our parents were bad parents because they allowed us to drink. They didn't know any better. They were raised in the same manner. In those days, it was socially acceptable for an 8-year-old child to drink beer, but looking back on it, it was definitely the beginning of a bad habit.

How did it affect my life? I became an alcoholic. I'll talk more about that later in the book.

When I was young, though, we looked at drinking as just another part of having a good time.

One day, before he left for work, Dad told us to go to the field and string some barbwire. That was a tough job. We lined up the fence by running a string from one corner of the desired area to another, then marking the spots where the posts would go. After digging the post holes and installing the posts, we used a wire stretcher to attach the wire to the posts.

On this particular day, it was hot. Like most kids, we loved to go swimming, so we decided to postpone the work on the fence and go down to the swimming hole at Black Bridge, which crossed the Nation River. We were having the time of our lives, swimming and carrying on ... until we heard the sound of the tractor. We immediately knew that we were in trouble. Trouble spelled M-O-M. After she gave us a lecture on the values of work ethics, and how important our work was, we were instructed to march right back to the fence and get to work.

When I was10 years old, Dad felt like my brothers and I were big enough to handle most of the chores on the farm, and he took a job at the Nestlé coffee plant in Chesterville. The profit we made from the sale of milk wasn't enough to support our family, so he took the job to supplement his income.

Even though he worked full time for Nestlé, my dad still worked morning and night on the farm. I remember many times when he would walk in from the field, grab a quick bite to eat, and go right off to work at Nestlé. That was a tough life, and my Dad was as tough as they come. People today think they have it tough, but it's nothing compared to what my parents had to do to make a living.

We lived close to the level of poverty. To help make ends meet, my Mom would work late into the night, baking pies and bread, and sewing clothes. She made all of our clothes. The only time we got anything store-bought was at Christmas, and even then, the clothes or toys we received were handed down from the older children. They say that ignorance is bliss, and perhaps it was, because we thought all families were like that.

My mom would make sure we did what we were supposed to do and would be there in case we had any problems. I don't know how my Dad got back and forth to work, but I do remember that he occasionally took the tractor. Usually, the tractor had to be used in the fields. We were always using it for plowing, cultivating, putting in posts, or a myriad of other jobs. When that was the case, as it was most of the time, he walked to work.

I recall the first tractor we had was a steel-wheel tractor. You had to crank it from the front to get it to start. I remember getting stuck in the cornfield when we were trying to get the crop in. We had a booming crop that year. My dad even took a stalk of corn to the County Fair that year and won first prize. It was the biggest stalk anybody had ever seen.

The kids today won't believe this, but we didn't have electricity until we were in our third home. On the other farms, we had several lanterns scattered throughout the house. At certain times of the year, it wouldn't get light until seven o'clock or so in the morning, so when we went outside to bring in the cows, we had to carry a lantern with us. When we moved to the third farm, the barn was wired for electricity, and we later added electricity to the house.

We didn't have running water, either. We had to cart it to the house in buckets. It seemed like we were constantly going to the pump to get water. We had to carry water to the house for washing clothes, for washing dishes,

and for washing ourselves. Of course, at the time, we didn't think anything about it. We never had running water at the spigot, so hauling water didn't seem to be anything out of the ordinary. We did have water in the barn, though. That, like everything else, was geared to taking care of the farm operation. We needed a big supply of fresh water for the animals.

Farming had its advantages. We always had fresh milk, of course. We also raised chickens, so we had fresh eggs and plenty of chicken for the frying pan. Watching my Dad butcher the animals was an experience in itself. It wasn't a neat and tidy process. In fact, it was just the opposite. It was quite brutal. Dad had to take an ax, or a sledgehammer, and hit the cows between the eyes. That only staggered the animal. After that, he had to slash the cow's throat, hang it from a tree, bleed it, and gut it. None of us kids liked to see that, but we understood that our survival depended on the slaughter of the cows, pigs, and chickens. We learned very early that we shouldn't get attached to farm animals, but if we were talking to Mom and Dad, we needed some way to differentiate between them, so we did give them each a name. That did make it somewhat tough when it came time to eat one of them.

We rented an icebox in town when we slaughtered. Whenever we needed meat, my Dad would make a trip to town and get enough out of the locker to feed us. By the time he got home, the meat was almost defrosted.

All of our food was grown on our farm. We had a big garden and grew everything you can think of: potatoes, tomatoes, radishes, cucumbers, and corn. It was hard work doing the cultivating and harvesting. We spent a lot of time in the garden, weeding and watering, not to mention eating raw vegetables. I remember pulling potatoes and radishes out of the ground, wiping them off on my shirt, and eating them.

We had a huge bin of potatoes in the basement. We had to pick through the potatoes every day and get rid of the ones that spoiled so they didn't spoil the rest of them. It was cool in the basement, almost like a refrigerator, although not as cold, so we stored a lot of vegetables down there. My Mom spent a lot of time in the kitchen, canning fruits and vegetables for the winter: apples, rhubarb, tomatoes, cucumbers, and radishes. The canning

season was a big thing to us kids. In that part of Canada, the winters were long and severe, so we had to keep a lot of food in reserve.

It was a humble life, but we had a lot of good times, especially at meal time. Mom and Dad sat at each end of the table, while the kids sprawled out on the long bench that ran down along the sides. We had good times together and long talks around the table. I'm thankful that my Mom set a good example each night by having all of us kids get down on our knees to pray. It was a foundation for a successful upbringing. I have to admit that I didn't appreciate it at the time, and I didn't learn much from it, either, but I appreciate it now. It was a good foundation and upbringing for later on in my life.

Chapter 2
The Meanest Fighter I Ever Fought

I jokingly tell people that I developed a lot of my wrestling skills from getting into scraps with my brothers and sisters. After she washed the kitchen floor, my oldest sister, Leona, would say, "You kids stay out of here until this floor dries." Of course, you know how young boys are. We would sneak into the kitchen to try and pilfer some of Mom's homemade bread or pie. Just when we thought we were in the clear, my sister would walk around the corner, brandishing a broom, or a mop. You developed lightning-like reflexes just trying to dodge her.

Like most boys [and sometimes the girls] in a family often do, we would fight and argue, but it would be forgotten within a day or two, and we would be friends again. I used to call my brother Raymond [the next oldest sibling to me], the "meanest fighter I ever fought." I gave him that nickname simply because he knew, without a doubt, that I could out-wrestle and outbox him, so he did whatever he had to do to beat me. His main tactic was to leg dive me. Once he got me on the ground, he would bite, or gouge my eyes, or grab my groin. If he ever latched on, it was almost impossible to get loose. My only recourse was to threaten to pull his eyeball out, or to do something along those lines, just to get him to let me go.

Years later, my alter ego, Ivan Koloff, would employ my brother Raymond's tactics in the wrestling ring ... but I'm getting ahead of myself.

Raymond and I had a conflict of personalities, so we locked horns several times. I can't remember what this one particular fight was about, but we got into a fight in the barn one day. I meant business and took a wild swing at his head. Unfortunately for me, he ducked and I hit one of the 4x4 posts that braced the roof of the barn. My fist swelled up to twice its normal size.

Even when I was older, we got into scuffles. I went to visit Ray one day when I was in wrestling school. My mother was there, too. After a few

drinks, Ray said something to my mother that I didn’t like. He ended up sinking his teeth into me and refusing to let go. I pulled his hair back and threatened to go for his eyeballs.

Our spats, however, weren’t always between family members. If somebody outside of the family picked on one of us, we came together and retaliated.

When I was 14 years old, we were playing hockey on an outdoor skating rink in Chesterville, which was a town of about 8,000 people. The city kids didn’t like the farm kids coming into town and skating at the rink, so we usually played against each other. It was almost like a rivalry and the games could get heated. One reason the city kids didn’t like us was because we didn’t know how to play hockey. At least, we didn’t know how to play according to the rules. We didn’t wear pads, either. We just got onto the ice and did whatever we could to win, which included checking and hitting the opposing team’s players.

Before the game even started, a boy from the opposing team came up behind Morris and tripped him. When my brother got to his feet, he turned around and punched the boy in the nose. I’m sure the boy’s nose was broken because there was blood all over the ice.

The boy’s cousin, who was a grown man, came to the defense of the boy. Both Morris and the boy were the same age—13 years old—but Morris was taller than the boy. The boy was a really good skater and hockey player, and stockier than Morris, but in a chubby sort of way. The boy’s cousin, however, came to his defense because he thought my brother was older and was picking on his smaller cousin. It was one of those, "I’m going to beat you guys up," moments.

When I saw that he was going to jump on Morris, I stepped up in his defense. I weighed close to 180 pounds and I was pretty strong from the hard work on the farm, not to mention the fact that the frequent tussles with my brother had made me tough. I tried to explain what happened, but he chased me off the ice rink and we started fighting, with both of us still wearing our skates. I couldn’t believe how weak the guy was. In a matter of seconds, I was on top of him, pummeling him with hard shots to the face.

Before I could do much damage, I felt somebody grab me by the back of my shirt and pick me up. I couldn’t see who it was, but they threw me up against the side of a tin building, discarding me as if I was a load of yesterday’s laundry. When I turned around, I realized that the "somebody" was a 300-plus pound woman, another relative of the boy. She was lucky that she was a woman because I would have creamed a man, but I have to admit that her size put me off and made me somewhat leery. They chased us off and we went straight home.

Of course, we went back to the arena at every opportunity, and as time went by, I became friends with a lot of the kids who had been there that night.

My brother Roger and I were walking through the Italian section of town one day on our way to the store. Roger was pretty good with his fists, too. We got into words with somebody over something. I don’t remember what it was, but as young kids were wont to do, we would use any excuse to start a fight. The words escalated until Roger and the guy were flailing away at each other. When the guy took him down with an amateur wrestling move, Roger’s head cracked against the pavement and he bled pretty badly. There were quite a few other people standing around, so I stepped in to make sure that nobody else was going to interfere. That was just one of those crazy things that happen when the words start to fly.

The funniest thing about that incident was that the story made the newspapers. It was reported that two young men [Roger and I] were attacked. We were considered to be the "good guys" because we were outnumbered.

Another time, years later, we were drinking at a pub in Hamilton, Ontario. When we walked outside, a big, tall guy—about 6-foot-9—got into an argument with Roger and they squared off on the sidewalk. My brother had a killer knockout punch. I never knew that a guy’s feet could still be on the ground when the back of his head hit the pavement, but that’s what happened. Roger used a quick combination and uppercut to send the guy to the ground. His head snapped back and he was out cold. Roger tells me that I backed quite a few guys down myself, but I must have had too much to drink because I honestly don’t recall those.

Also years later, after getting into trouble with the law, Morris and I were out drinking. After making some remarks to a woman at the bar, Morris and I walked outside, but we were followed by the woman's boyfriend and his friends. He approached me and made some threatening remarks, so I told him off. We sparred off, but nothing came of it. Before we could start fighting, a couple of policemen walked up and grabbed me on both sides. They must have known the guy because they held me while he walked over and sucker-punched me on the jaw. My jaw was sore for two weeks.

I was hot, so later that night, Morris and I decided to get revenge. We asked around, found out where the guy and his friends hung out, and went down to pick a fight with him. Fortunately for everybody, they weren't there, so nothing ever came of it. I was in a wrestling school at the time and thought a reputation for beating up guys in bars would enhance my marketability, but that was the wrong approach to take.

Chapter 3
Fox in the Henhouse

As far back as I can remember, Mom and Dad always insisted that we go to church. For several years, we didn't have a car, so we depended on horses as our primary method of transportation. Each Sunday, we would ride two horses and buggies over the ten miles to the church in Chesterville. In the winter, we would hitch the horses to sleighs.

It would be a stretch to say that I enjoyed going to church with my parents, but what I did enjoy was going to the store after church for a treat. We would use the money we made from collecting bottles to buy a chocolate bar, or another treat that caught our fancy.

The younger readers might not remember this, but in those days, drinks like Coca-Cola and Pepsi were sold in glass bottles. When you bought a drink, the cashier charged you a 5-cent deposit on the bottle. When you finished the drink and returned the bottle to the store, or any other store, your five cents would be returned. One of the best things about the deposit was that many people didn't care about the nickel. They would throw the bottles from their car windows into the ditch, or dispose of them in garbage cans. During the week, we spent our free-time tracking down those unwanted bottles, and cashing them in. That was a great source of revenue for kids. Unfortunately, that source of income dried up as the bottling companies made the switch from glass to plastic bottles.

We didn't always pay for our treats, though. As time went by, we developed a new system for getting candy. While one of us kept the store clerks busy and their attention distracted, either my brothers or I would fill our pockets with candy bars and other sweet treats. We never got caught, which was really a shame because we never got disciplined, and we assumed that shoplifting must be okay as long as we didn't get caught.

We also tried to sneak cigarettes from the store. Most of the time, though, we would make our own by rolling plain paper around regular grass from the lawn or pasture. We didn’t realize that what we were doing was bad for our health. Like most kids, we just wanted to get away with something that we weren’t allowed to do. We would smoke at the Black Bridge, which was about a half mile from our second farm.

While I’m on the subject of Black Bridge, we met a kid who used to come visit his aunt during the summer holidays. He was older than we were, but we all liked each other and got along well. One day, he offered us 25 cents to climb to the top of the bridge and jump off. I remember how scared I was, but I took him up on his dare and did it.

Like a lot of kids, we did many things that were vindictive and mean. For example, there was a junkyard along the river where people dumped their trash. If the weather was bad and we couldn’t go swimming down at Black Bridge, we would go to the junkyard to see if we could find any treasures. While we were on our way home one day when I was 8 years old, we saw a tree that was filled with ripe apples. We jumped the fence, helped ourselves, and headed home. As we were climbing back over the fence, an old lady came outside and told us to stay off her property. When she saw the apples, she said, "I’ll call the police if I catch you stealing my apples again."

Being the vindictive little guys that we were, we decided to show her how we felt about the tongue-lashing she gave us. On the following day, we each knocked over a row of her corn at the back of her farm.

As boys sometimes do, we also got into our share of dangerous situations. When we lived on the farm where my younger brother was born, the Nation River would freeze over each winter. We would clean off a spot on the ice and play hockey, even if we only played against each other. We made our hockey sticks by cutting a branch, which had a shape close to that of a hockey stick, from a tree. Hockey pucks were easy to find. We used pieces of dried horse manure. We didn’t wear pads or any other kind of protection.

Real hockey players don’t wear pads.

Very often, one of us would come home with a bloody nose, or limping after taking a hit from a wayward hockey stick. We had some great times.

Most of the time, it took several weeks for the river to freeze completely. We had to wait until it got really cold and froze solid before we could go out and play on it. At least, if you were smart, you waited. One year, the ice hadn’t frozen over properly when we attempted to play. My youngest brother, Jerry, was very small, but his lack of weight didn’t keep him from breaking through the ice and falling into the water. We all weighed more than he did, so we knew the ice wouldn’t hold our weight. Our only option was to run home and get Mom to help us. Mom knew exactly what to do. "Take the ladder to the river! Lay the ladder down on the ice, crawl out on the ladder, and pull him out." By the time she walked to the river, Morris had crawled out on the ladder and pulled Jerry to safety. He was wet and crying like a baby, but he was safe.

That was a good example of how wise my Mom was. She knew that the ladder would distribute our weight along the ice. I don’t know if I would have come up with a solution, but she immediately had an answer to the problem.

Mom also had a way of disciplining us when we did something wrong, or when we were fighting. She would walk into the room and say, "What’s going on? Who started the fight?"

When we clammed up and refused to give her the information, or tried to blame each other, she said, "I want to know who started this. I’ll give you ten minutes to confess. If you don’t, every one of you will get a whipping."

We soon learned that it was better to rat out the person who instigated the trouble, because Mom was a 200-pounder. When she whipped us, she could really put some force behind those swats. Even worse, she made us go into the woods to get a green branch, which she would use to whip our behinds. At first, we tried to find a dry branch because we knew they would break. Unfortunately, she soon caught on to our shenanigans, and that was our undoing. If she didn’t like the switch we came back with, she would go to the woods herself and pick one that better met her standards. Her choice was always a thick, solid, green branch.

After Mom finished doling out the punishment, the instigator who didn’t confess would get a licking from the other brothers and sisters who had received the unearned punishment.

The only time I really remember my dad disciplining me was when I was responsible for closing up the henhouse at night. One night, when I forgot to do it before coming into the house, a fox got in and killed a couple of hens. Dad didn’t give me a whipping or anything like that, but he booted me all the way out the door. I made the fastest time ever in getting to the hen house. It was something he had to do to get my attention and to teach me responsibility. I don’t think I ever forgot to close the henhouse door again.

The only time I showed any objection to taking a licking was when I was 14 years old. We had to clean the fields by picking up rocks and stones and putting them along the fencerow. After doing that all day long, I came home hot, sweaty, and tired. My mother had just come back with the horse from cultivating the fields. The horse was agitated by the flies that were swarming around it, so my mother hollered at me, "Get over here and help me get this horse unharnessed."

I didn’t like the way she hollered at me. I was tired, too, so instead of doing what I was told, I went into the house to get a drink. I heard her yell at me two more times, but I didn’t go out. When I heard her storm through the front door, I scampered out the back and circled around the house to act as if I had been on my way to help her.

When I walked in the front door, she had the leather straps, lines, and reins, in her hands. "Take your shirt off," she ordered, "and bend over the table."

She not only whacked me on the rear end, but on my back, as well. The reason she had me take off my shirt was because she wanted it to sting, and believe me … my mother could handle that belt. After a half dozen or more whacks, I was in pain, but I was a big kid by that time, about 190 pounds, and my pride wouldn’t allow me to cry. I turned around and said, "Is that the hardest you can hit?"

It’s a wonder that she didn’t slap my face. All she said was, "You wait until your dad gets home. He’ll make you cry."

She must have cooled off because she never said anything to him, but I worried about it the rest of that night. My mom and dad were very loving, but they had to whip us now and then. If you had ten kids, especially seven, strapping boys, you occasionally had to remind everybody who the boss was.

When I left home at age 17, we were living at the farm between Finch and Chesterfield. My parents were probably there for another ten years before they quit farming and went to live in Ottawa. When my dad retired from Nestlé, he received a small pension, but it wasn't enough to live on, so he worked a variety of jobs to help supplement his income. He took a job in British Columbia as the manager of an apartment building, then moved back to Alberta, where they lived close to some of my brothers. Even when he was an older man, he worked hard. When he was 70 years old, he did janitorial work at McDonald's.

God bless my youngest brother, Jerry, and his wife, Judy. They were more or less the caretakers for Mom and Dad during their last years. Jerry and Judy are good Christian people who really took good care of Mom and Dad, who lived in their home until the last five years of their life. My youngest living sister, Jean, lived in the Red Deer, Alberta, area, so she was very helpful, too, until she moved to British Columbia with her son, Cliff.

When Dad was about 80 years old, Mom began having problems with arthritis. They went into a nursing home and lived there together until they died. Jerry and Judy took things to them and helped them when services were needed.

My dad, William, passed away of natural causes in 1995 at the age of 85. He was a small man in statue, about five-foot-six and 150 pounds, but in the eyes of our family, he was a giant. What a great example he was to us. One evening after my dad passed away, as the family sat around the porch, Mom said to us, "I wish that God would give us a sign that Dad was in heaven."

Just as she said that, a beautiful rainbow filled the sky. Mom accepted that as the answer from God and thanked Him.

A couple of years ago, before my mom passed away, she told me on the phone that she had a dream. Dad came floating by on a cloud and said, "Jump on, Blanche. Let’s go home."

My mom was a strong woman and a great influence for all of us. She was bedridden for the last few years of her life and she put up a good fight to the end.

Most importantly, she always put her faith in God’s promises.

Chapter 4
"When I was a kid ..."

Warning to readers! I am about to tell a "Well, when I was a kid ..." story. It will probably be much like others you've heard from your parents, but it's an insight into my childhood that I think is important.

I went to school in Nation River Valley when we moved to the second farm. The schools weren't the ultra-modern, high-tech schools that people are blessed with now. They were country schools for grades 1 through 8 with an enrollment of about 35 students. In the morning, we walked to the school, which was about half a mile from our farm. At lunchtime, we hurried home to eat lunch, and then walked back to school again. It really wasn't too bad, although I'm sure we grumbled about it at times. Like every mother, our Mom would say, "Walking to school is good exercise. It will keep you in shape."

I can remember the route we walked very vividly. In the winter, when the snow plow came through and pushed the snow back, the snow banks would stretch halfway up the telephone poles. At times, the wall of snow was so high that, from a distance, you couldn't even see the traffic. It wasn't like that all winter long, but especially after a bad snowstorm. I remember walking to school and feeling like I was in a big tunnel. The road, which was just made up of gravel, was so narrow that it was barely wide enough for two cars to pass in opposite directions. When cars drove by, we had to snuggle up against the side of the snowbank to avoid getting hit. We had incredibly cold winters there that would last six or seven months.

When we moved to the farm near Finch, Ontario, the public school was more than two miles away. We got plenty of exercise because we had to walk to and from school each day. We also had to pack our lunch because there wasn't enough time to go home and eat. Occasionally, we forgot to fix our lunch the night before, so we had to run home, eat lunch, and run back. We had an hour for lunch, so that wasn't too tough for farm boys. After we

moved to the third farm, I attended Finch High School—and we didn't have to walk to school! We got picked up by a bus.

After going to Finch for a couple of years, we moved to a farm that was located almost dead-center between Finch and Chesterville, and I transferred to another school. Moving so many times as a farm kid was almost as bad as being a wrestler's kid, but that was our last move before I left home.

When I talk about moving from one farm to another, the young people today probably picture my family packing our belongings in a U-Haul trailer, and herding the cattle onto a truck for transport to our new farm. It wasn't that easy. Each time we moved, we had to walk, herding the cattle along the road. We had to make sure they stayed on the road, and didn't wander into a farmer's yard. Most of the farms were lined with fences, but there were no gates to block access to the houses and yards. We also had to race ahead of the cattle to stop them from wandering into the lane.

When I went into the tenth grade at Chesterville High School, they measured us. I was about five-foot-ten. Today, I'm two inches shorter because of a couple of ruptured discs.

I never finished high school, opting to quit two weeks before school ended when I was in the 11th grade. My brother, Morris, and I loved to play Ping-Pong during recess. One day, a teacher took the paddles away from us because we were being a little too rowdy. We didn't let the fact that we didn't have paddles stop us from playing. We found some hard-cover atlases, which weren't much bigger than a paddle, and started to play with them. When the teacher saw us, she threatened me with a three-day suspension. I had an attitude at that time in my life [and for several years after that], so I told her, "You can't suspend me."

From the look she gave me, you would have thought that I had slapped her in the face. Kids didn't talk to teachers like that in those days. I'm sure there were students who did, but it didn't happen often, and when it did, they were dismissed from school immediately. When she regained her composure, she said, "I'll show you that I CAN suspend you."

"No, you can’t," I responded, "because I quit!"

I had been thinking about quitting for some time, so the incident just pushed me into making the decision to go through with it. I wanted to go out into the world and get a job. By this time, I had already gone further in school than my Mom and Dad had, and to my way of thinking, they were doing all right in life. That was the mentality back then, especially in the rural areas of the country. People didn’t think you needed a lot of education to get a good job.

My parents tried to encourage me to stay, but my mind was made up. I was 17 years old, and like most 17-year-olds, I knew everything about everything—or at least, I thought I did.

I was a lot like any other normal kid, but I did get into some trouble now and then. When my brothers and I went to a friend’s house, I noticed that he had a collection of coins on top of their refrigerator. I remember telling my brother, "You keep him busy while I grab some of his coins." My friend’s family wasn’t rich, but they were well-off. At least, like most people seem to assume about others, I thought they were. My motivation, however, wasn’t just greed. Our friend often bragged about the money and possessions his family had, so we were going to teach him a lesson. I won’t go so far as to say we were going to take the coins, and then return them after he had "learned" his lesson. I’m sure we intended to keep the coins.

When it came to breaking the law, I wasn’t very smart. I took the coins to school and showed them to all of my friends. They, in turn, teased my friend and told him that they knew where his coins were. Before too long, the identity of the culprits was known to everyone—including my Mom. When I got home that evening, she made me walk to my friend’s house to return the coins and apologize. That was a good lesson for me. Most of the time, I did things like that and got away with it, but it made me realize that my sins would eventually catch up to me.

We did a lot of rowdy things. Halloween was a time when most kids went trick-or-treating, but since we lived in such a rural area, the houses were a half mile or more apart. When we got older, we decided to forget the treats and concentrate on the tricks. The kids would all try to outdo each other. We

would put discs, harrows, and other farm machinery up in the trees. The next morning, the farmers would drive to town to collect their missing parts.

When I was old enough to drive, I went to the country with my younger brother, Morris. When I spotted a farmer’s wagon sitting in a field, I told Morris, "Why don’t you sit in the trunk of the car and hold the tongue of the wagon. When I give you the signal, throw the tongue up into the air and let it go."

When we were going around a corner at about 30 miles per hour, I gave him the signal. The wagon rolled into a churchyard and right up onto the steps of the church. I didn’t go back to look until the next day, but when I did, the wagon was gone.

When I was 9 years old, my brothers and I were walking down the road after a trip to the junkyard. When an expensive car full of businessmen drove by, I yelled at them. "You rich SOBs."

I immediately realized my mistake when the car stopped. We had no place to run because there was thick vegetation on both sides of the road, and we were sure the men were going to beat us up. The driver backed the car to where we stood and asked, "What did you say?"

"I didn’t say anything," I replied.

"Well, I thought you said something bad," he explained.

"No, sir," I lied. "I wouldn’t do that, sir."

"Okay. Why don’t you take this bag of marshmallows?"

He gave me a whole bag of marshmallows. We had never tasted marshmallows before, so for the next fifteen minutes or so, we ate them as fast as we could.

When I was in school, they didn’t have organized football. Hockey was very popular in Canada, but the high school didn’t offer that, either. Even if

they did, we wouldn’t have been able to play because we couldn’t afford it.

When we had time to play, we played touch football. At least, we were supposed to be playing touch ball. Very often, we would trip the opposing players by "accident," and as a result, we would often end up fighting.

By the time I was 15 years old, I was getting quite stocky, so I didn’t have anybody picking fights with me very often. I didn’t have any weights, so I started lifting things on the farm, trying to build up my body. I remember standing on the feed scale and weighing 200 pounds. In my imagination, I was thinking, "Oh, man! I’m getting big enough to be a wrestler."

When we were cultivating the corn, I walked from dawn to dusk, day after day, behind the horses. My legs and arms were muscular and I fancied myself to be a good athlete, but I didn’t know anything about cardiovascular conditioning. I realized how out-of-shape I was on Field Day, when I entered the Two-Mile Race. In a matter of seconds, I was way out in front of the pack, but I fell back sharply when my wind gave out. My legs were strong enough to run for a long time, but due to a lack of proper training, I didn’t have the wind.

It’s unfortunate that I wasn’t able to play organized sports because it might have kept me out of trouble, and I might have stayed in school. When I was in school, we got into the kind of trouble that rowdy kids find themselves in from time to time. However, after I quit school, my rowdiness became more serious and I got into trouble with the law.

Chapter 5
Cattle Rustlers

I want to share the next part of my story, not because I’m proud of it, or because it makes interesting reading, but to let youngsters know that even bad kids can turn their lives around and become successful. On the other hand, I also want them to know that getting into trouble leads to things like jail, and that is not a place you want to be.

After quitting school, Morris and I got a seasonal job in Kraft’s cheese factory. We worked hard and put in 12-hour shifts. Most of our income was put back into the family budget, but we were able to keep enough to buy gas, beer, and have a little date or party on the weekend. Cows don’t give as much milk in the winter, so when the milk production slows down, the company begins to lay off their seasonal workers. As we expected, we were laid off, so we began looking for another job.

We looked for work for a few days, but we couldn’t find anything. When those few days turned into a couple of weeks, we started to get impatient. We wanted a job. We wanted to work. With job prospects in the area at an all-time low, we decided to become self-employed and go into business for ourselves. We went into the cattle business.

I’m embarrassed to admit it, but our business was illegal—stealing calves from local ranches.

We came up with an idea of picking up a calf here and there. It wasn’t something we put a lot of thought into. It was just an idea we had when we saw a calf while we were driving around one day. Half jokingly, somebody said, "Why don’t we pick up that calf and sell it?"

That was exactly what we did.

When we were unable to find a job the following week, one of my brothers and I decided to do it again, but we stole two calves that time. The next time, we took the back seat out of the car and took three calves. On a couple of occasions, we actually had five calves in the car at one time. While I drove, my brother would try to keep them calm while he kept a lookout for the police. That's what greed does to a person. We began thinking that more calves would mean more money in our pockets.

Our method of operation was to find a calf in a field that was far from any farmer's house. We chased it down, just like in the old western movies, except that we were on foot. After one of us lassoed it with a rope, the other got in close enough to twist the calf's head and pull it to the ground. We then muscled the calf back to my 1955 Mercury Meteor, which was a fast car with a V8 engine, and crammed it into the back seat. We then took it to a sale in Ottawa, which was about 30 miles away. That car could really move, unless it had too many calves in it.

On the weekends, we would wash the car—not only on the outside, but the inside, as well. We would hose it out completely. I'll never forget Mom saying, "You're good boys for taking such good care of your car." That statement alone made me feel bad about our deception.

When I look back on it, I really am ashamed. I was raised on a farm, so I knew how important a farmer's cows were to his livelihood. For us to do something like that shows how easily a person can get off track and do stupid things.

We didn't get caught for a couple of months, but it had to be somewhat obvious when two young kids arrived at a sale with a carload of calves. I'm sure we had both entertained the thought, but one of us finally said, "It's a lot of work to chase down five calves. Why go to all this trouble when we can just take one big cow? We can get more money for a big cow than we can for five calves."

The first cow we rustled also turned out to be the last cow we would ever steal. When we lassoed it, it started to run, and we couldn't hold it. I managed to get close enough to wrap my arms around its neck, but it took

off with me hanging in the air. Eventually, though, my weight wore it down and it fell to the ground.

As we reached the top of a big hill on the way back to our car, we noticed lights heading down the road in our direction. It was the police. I thought we would do better by splitting up, so I told my brother, "I'll come back to get you. If they catch me, find your way home. That way, they won't get both of us."

I took off down a side road at about 100 miles per hour and managed to elude the police. An hour or so later, I went back and picked up my brother.

Our downfall was the result of stupidity—ours! Even though we knew the authorities were onto us, we took the cow to the sale. That yearling had a tag with a registration number attached to its ear, so it could be traced, and when we took the cow to the sale, we had to show our license and sign a form.

It was just a matter of time before the police showed up at our house. It really wasn't that hard to find us. They just went to the address that we had put on the form. Smart, huh?

You can imagine how embarrassed Mom and Dad were when several police cars pulled up in front of our house at 4:00 in the morning, with their flashing lights lighting up the dark sky. The police had arrest warrants for all three of us, but they only arrested my younger brother and me. Ray hadn't been involved in our scheme since we sold the first calf, and he wasn't living at home during that time.

I was 18 years old at the time, so in the eyes of the law, I was going to be treated as an adult. We were put into the back seat of a patrol car and driven to the county jail in Cornwall. It was a 25-mile trip and they drove at high speeds with the lights flashing and sirens blaring. I think they were only doing it to scare us, but it was a high-profile case of cattle rustling, so I'm sure they wanted to let everyone know that they had caught someone bad.

When we arrived at the police station, we were booked into the jail, which was populated with about 20 inmates. Each inmate was supposed to have

their own cell, but it was overcrowded, so people were living in both the cells and the eating area.

You had to watch your back at all times. One prisoner had just been released from the Kingston Penitentiary. During the train ride on his way back home to Montreal, he drank too much alcohol and got into trouble. When the train stopped in Cornwall, the authorities took him off the train and booked him into the Cornwall jail. He was so upset that he started throwing things, and fought with anyone who came within five feet of him. As punishment, the jailers put him in solitary confinement. We referred to it as "the hole." The hole was in the basement of the jail and secluded from everybody else.

We were in jail for four days. My brother was still a minor, so he shouldn't have been in the county jail. He should have been placed in a detention home for juveniles. To pass the time, we played cards and arm-wrestled. My brother and I were pretty good at arm wrestling, but we minded our own business and didn't go around making challenges. The other prisoners found out, though, and they wanted to arm wrestle us.

Two days after we were imprisoned, Ray showed up at the jail and turned himself in. The authorities would have caught up with Ray eventually, because even though he only went with us that one time, he signed and showed his driver's license at the sale. He tried to take the blame for everything, telling the officials that he was responsible for the thefts, and that we had nothing to do with it. He was trying to get us off with a lighter sentence because neither of us had been in any kind of trouble with the law before. Unfortunately, by that time, my brother and I had already confessed.

They had all kinds of evidence against us and we couldn't afford a lawyer, so when they held our hearing, we plead guilty. We did have a court-appointed defender, but he didn't do anything except collect his fee from the taxpayer. When we stood up in front of the judge for our sentencing, we were no longer cocky, young punks. We were just three scared kids.

The judge said, "Young fellas. Fifty years ago, I would have hung you from the nearest tree for your offense."

He was exaggerating a little bit because they hadn’t hanged anybody for cattle rustling for over 75 years, but we didn’t know that and his statement got our attention. I was thinking, "Oh, my God. We’re going to be executed right here." I prayed to God for deliverance, even though I knew nothing about praying.

That was the first time that I had been in trouble. It wasn’t the first time I had done something wrong. It was just the first time that I had gotten caught. The judge gave me five months in prison. Ray got 15 months, while my younger brother got off with time-served and a year’s probation. That was a lesson in itself because Ray was only involved in the first robbery, and yet, he got the harshest sentence. It shows that even if you were only the driver of the car, you were just as guilty as the rest of the participants, and your punishment could be as bad or worse. I felt bad about that because Ray didn’t come along with us after the first time, and he suffered the consequences of our continued actions.

My most vivid memory from my time in prison was feeling bad for my Mom and Dad, especially since they depended on my brother and me for help around the farm. In one of the letters I got from my Mom, she said she wondered how they were going to pay their bills. If it’s possible to feel any worse than I did, you would be a very miserable person.

Ray and I were transferred from the local jail to the maximum security section of Guelph Penitentiary, which housed over 2,000 inmates. Murder, rape, and burglary were the crimes of most of the inmates. It was a bad place for anyone to find themselves, much less an 18-year-old farm boy.

As we lined up for lunch one afternoon, Ray had the two top buttons of his shirt undone. You were allowed to have the top button loose, but all of the other buttons had to be buttoned. A guard grabbed my brother by the arm and told him to button his shirt. My brother wasn’t one to back down easily, but he didn’t fight back. I’m not exaggerating when I tell you that the guard was as tall as Andre the Giant. Ray did as he was told.

It was hard to stay out of trouble because the gangs would come around and intimidate you, especially if you were new. When you entered the prison system, you were given a new shirt, boots, and pants. The guards also gave

each inmate a pack of cigarettes each day. I didn’t smoke, but my brother did, so I gave my ration to him. The gangs, in turn, would intimidate us and try to get us to give them our things.

One day, while we were in the basement with about 500 other prisoners, I noticed a group of guys surrounding my brother. The day before, Ray had told me that they wanted some of his new clothes and his tobacco. As soon as I saw him being surrounded, I shouted his name. He called out my name, as well, which caused everyone to turn around and look, including the guards. When that happened, the gang was forced to disperse and leave my brother alone.

Later that day, the gang leader walked up to me and said, "Don’t you ever try anything like that again. If you do, it will be the last time you do that. Mind your own business."

"Ray is my brother," I said. "If you do anything to him, you’ll have to do it to me, too."

We didn’t have any trouble after that and they left us alone. I think they respected me for standing up for my brother.

Not too long after that, an inmate was murdered, and I saw it happen. Prisoners had their own system of judging other prisoners, and everybody seemed to think that everybody else’s crime was worse than their own. The condemned inmate had been convicted of raping a young, black man. Normally, inmates convicted of sexual crimes were placed into individual cells, and were not allowed to mingle with the general population. For some reason, the guards let this individual out of his holding cell. That was a mistake because the inmates knocked him to the ground and killed him by kicking him repeatedly. Some of the inmates who took part in the brutal murder were in prison themselves for murder, but they didn’t like sex offenders. They thought a sex offense was worse than murder.

I was glad that my crime—rustling—wasn’t a crime that the inmates didn’t like.

Prison was a terrible place, and you had to watch your back at all times. For the most part, I spent as much time as possible in my cell. I'd pray in my own simple way. "Help me get out of here, Jesus. Please!" I didn't know how to pray very well, and I wasn't a religious person, but even then, I was calling out to Jesus for help.

After a little more than a month, we passed a test that allowed us to go to minimum security. Before we left, though, we were put to another test. Five days before we were transferred, they put us in what were called K-cells. The windows had been broken out and there was no heat. We were in the middle of January and the winter was very harsh. The weather was very, very cold. The water in the sink was frozen, the only place to use the bathroom was a hole in the floor, and we slept in our clothes on bare, metal springs. I think they put everyone through that treatment before they were released. It was one last reminder of how bad prison life could be, and geared to discourage us from doing anything in the future that might bring us back to prison.

When we lived in minimum security, we were pretty much on our own. There was a fence around the yard, but anybody could have escaped easily. However, just the memory of life in maximum security was enough to discourage us from doing anything that might put us back there.

We were given opportunities to learn a trade. Ray took a mechanics course and I worked in the tool shop.

The inmates worked in shifts. I was in charge of having the inmates sign out tools: picks, shovels, hammers, sledge hammers, saws, or whatever they needed for whatever job they were assigned to do. I also fixed tools that were broken. For example, during the winter, the coal shovels would get bent and twisted at the end. I would put them in a vice grip and bend or file the edges until they were straight.

The time passed quickly because I only had a couple of months left, but Ray still had 12 months left on his sentence. I got out early because they knocked off a percentage of my time each month for good behavior. Ray got out a short time later, having done 12 months of the 15-month sentence.

I’m proud of my older brother. Ray never got into trouble after that and established a successful trucking business. He retired recently, but he’s a workhorse who enjoys staying busy. He has a nice family, including grandchildren, and owns homes in both Ottawa and Florida. Sometimes, we just need to be put on the right course by being corrected for our mistakes.

When I was released from prison, I was given a train ticket and whatever money I had in savings from the few cents a day that I earned. I rode the train back to Chesterville and hitchhiked the ten miles from the train station to our farm.

Shortly after I got back home, Morris and I took a job working in construction at Carleton University in Ottawa. We worked there for six months during the coldest part of the winter. Shortly after we got there, Morris and I bought an old school bus and we took the seats out.

That’s where we lived.

A farmer on the outskirts of Ottawa allowed us to park our bus on his farm and run an extension wire from the bus to his house. The electricity gave us some dim lighting and allowed us to use a small burner, which was all we had for heat. It was very, very cold. At times, the outside temperature would get down to 30 degrees below zero. In the bus itself, the temperatures would often drop to zero. We managed to get by, although it was a tough way for two young kids to live.

Eventually, my brother, Morris, and I pooled our money together and purchased a 1956 Buick. Unfortunately we tore the undercarriage and transmission out of the car as we were on the way to work one day. The roads were very slippery from the icy rain, which had frozen solid underneath a layer of snow. As we drove down a hill, I realized I had a choice to make—either go through a red light, which would probably result in an accident, or turn into the ditch and knock down a steel post cable barrier. I chose the ditch. The good part was the barrier stopped the car, but only after we ran over about a dozen posts. The bad part was the car wasn’t drivable, so we had to leave the car behind to be fixed.

A lot of the construction workers were in the union and wouldn’t work if the weather conditions were too harsh. Morris and I would work under any conditions. We grew up on the farm, where you were expected to work hard without complaint, so we volunteered to work even when nobody else showed up. The foreman loved us for it, but as a result, we got into a few scrapes with some Italian workers who thought we were trying to muscle in on their jobs. I suppose you could make a case that we were taking their jobs, but it was only because we were there to make as much money as we could.

At the time, my dream was to become a professional wrestler, so I always thought of myself as a tough guy. I had no training as a fighter, but I had been in many fights during my childhood years, so I wasn’t going to back down from anyone. And I suppose my experiences paid off, because even though I had no formal training, I would always do pretty well in a fight.

Chapter 6
Red McNulty, The Irish Rogue

My discovery of professional wrestling didn’t come about until 1950, when I was 8 years old. I was spending the night with a friend and we were watching a snowy picture on their black-and-white television. When wrestling came on, I was spellbound by what I saw. I fell in love with it immediately. From that point on, I had one goal in mind for my life. I wanted to be a wrestler.

I didn’t see it very many times after that because we lived quite a distance from my friend’s place. When we finally got our own television, I was 15 years old, and I started to watch it religiously.

One day, while Morris and I were working at Carleton University, I got a call from my older brother, Roger, who was working for a steel company named Stelco in Hamilton, Ontario, about 300 miles away from where we were in Ottawa. Roger always looked out for me and gave me sound, welcome advice. When I was a kid, he told me, "You need to read everything you can because there’s a lot of knowledge to be gained from reading."

Roger knew about my dream of becoming a wrestler, so when he heard about a couple of wrestling schools in Hamilton, he immediately called me and suggested that I move there. I didn’t stop to think about it. I made my decision instantly. "Morris, I’m quitting the construction job. I’m moving to Hamilton, Ontario, to pursue a career in wrestling. Why don’t you come with me?"

Morris and I both quit our job, then called Roger, who came to get us and take us to Hamilton.

Unfortunately, shortly after we arrived in Hamilton, we got into trouble. Roger, Morris, and I, went out drinking one night. One thing led to another

and we got arrested—again! This time, it was for disorderly conduct. While we were in jail, I arranged to sell our car so we could pay our fine and get out of jail. Since Roger was the only one working at the time, they released him so he could pick up his paycheck at Stelco, and after selling our car, he came back to get us out. We owned a 1956 Chevy Bel Air—a good car with a beautiful body. It had chrome headliner bands, chrome spears on the front fenders, chrome window moldings, and full wheel covers. Selling that car really hurt, but we had to sacrifice to get out of jail. By the time Roger sold the car and took care of all the details, we had been in jail for almost a week.

While we were in jail, Morris got tired of hearing one of the inmates talk about what a good arm wrestler he was. "I'll try you," said Morris. My brother put him down with ease. The guy got pretty upset, but Morris was a big man by that time, so the guy backed down and left us alone.

Years later, after I became a wrestler, I remember arm wrestling Morris when I went home to visit. At the time, my Dad was a small man, about 152 pounds, and more than 70 years old. Even so, he was very strong, and we had a lot of trouble putting him down. Usually, out of respect, we wouldn't put him down. That was my first experience at "working" arm wrestling matches. Later in my wrestling career, I would have arm wrestling matches in the ring against my opponents as part of storyline angles.

Morris and I didn't have any problem getting a job with Stelco. It was obvious to the foreman that we were hard-working guys, and my brother had a good reputation as a reliable worker. By that time, I was almost 19 years old, and my body had filled out into that of a strapping and muscular young man. I started out working as a laborer in the department where the steel ingots were conditioned and held that job for a little more than a year. The job conditions were the exact opposite of those we faced on the construction job in Ottawa. It was very hot in the conditioning room, where the steel ingots came directly out of the furnace, especially during the summer months.

Since our Buick was still in Ottawa being repaired, I decided to get another car. This time, I bought a 1955 Rolls Royce. I wish I still had that car today. Unfortunately, that car, as beautiful as it was, cost too much for repairs.

When I had to replace a vacuum brake pump, it put me more than $200 in the hole, and I found myself unable to keep up with the cost of the repairs. I traded it for a brand-new, 1963 Studebaker Skylark—a red and white V8 bomb that would go 130 mph. Believe me, I tested that and my brother, Morris, can vouch for it.

While I was working one weekend, Morris and Bob offered to drive my Studebaker to Ottawa to get the 1956 Buick, which had finally been repaired. I went along with the arrangement, but only after we agreed that if they wrecked the car, they would take over the payments. To this day, I don't know all the details of what happened, but the Buick was wrecked on the way home and Morris took over the payments. Morris, being a good mechanic, decided to take out the Buick's engine and put it in a 1940 Ford Coupe. I'm not mechanically inclined, but somehow, he rigged up a solenoid switch that allowed him to change gears.

We decided to race the Studebaker and the Ford to see which one was faster. You have to imagine my brother, Morris, using a wooden box for a seat. We got on a four lane highway during a time of day when there was no traffic and we started off nose-to-nose. The speedometer to the Ford Coupe wasn't hooked up, so we planned to give each other a hand signal when we had reached 100 mph. At that point, we would step on the gas. If I had not been there, I wouldn't have believed it. When we had each accelerated to 100 mph and given the signal, we pushed our gas pedals to the floor. I heard his tires squeal as he laid rubber and he left me behind. I had the needle buried, but he quickly pulled to at least a hundred feet ahead of me.

When we decided to stop, he was still picking up speed, but he had to let up because the Ford was shaking so hard that he got scared. It is a wonder that the car didn't fall to pieces. Morris had done a great job of building it. I'm glad I stuck to wrestling!

My job title at Stelco was scarfer. The job of a scarfer was to take a torch and cut out defects from steel ingots that had been lowered onto rails by a crane. The ingots ranged in length from two feet to eight feet, while the steel bars could be up to 40 feet long.

Whenever I had free time, I would climb up into the crane and talk to the crane operator. We became friends and he explained the details on how to operate the crane. After I had been with the company for one year, an opening for a job as crane operator became available. Due to the knowledge I had gained from my friend, I got the job, which moved me up one pay class. During the three years I was with the company, I also became a union steward.

While I was working at Stelco, I visited two wrestling gyms—Al Spittles' and Jack Wentworth's. Al and Jack were both former professional wrestlers who now made their living by training aspiring young wrestlers for a career in the pros.

Al's original gym, located on the west side of Hamilton, was a converted two-car garage with weights and a wrestling mat. Al didn't have a ring set up in his gym—just mats. When the gym was condemned, Al opened a new gym in the Westdale section of Hamilton. That gym was new, but he continued to use the same old equipment, including the filthy, hard, wrestling mat. Both of Al's gyms were miserable places to train and workout. I don't even remember the gyms having an electric fan for circulation.

Al's gym may not have been state of the art, but he turned out many wrestlers who became big names in the business—John and Chris Tolos, Billy "Red" Lyons, Dewey Robertson, Bull Johnson, Vic Rossitani, and several others.

Jack Wentworth was born in 1907 and christened Alfred Hodgson. In 1932, he had his first professional wrestling match, and was paid the handsome sum of five dollars for his efforts. During his career, he wrestled in England, South Africa, Canada, the United States, and all points in-between. He was a very learned wrestler who excelled in the old style of wrestling. In 1958, not only did Jack open a wrestling school in Hamilton, but he made a wrestling tour of England with his crew of young hopefuls.

Two years later, Jack got his own building on Queenston Road in Hamilton, and for the next 12 years, he trained hundreds of young men in conditioning and bodybuilding at the Queenston Health Studio. For those who fit the bill

and met his standards, he taught them to wrestle. Jack did some of the training, but when he was working in other territories, the training was conducted by his brother George and his son Bob, who had decided to forgo a career in wrestling, an occupation that required long, grueling, miles on the road, and frequent injuries. Some of the wrestlers who were in the area would also come in to help. The best estimate is that Jack's school turned out 60 men who joined the touring professional ranks.

By the time I met Jack, he was 60 years old. He was about 5'10 and was quite strong. Even at that age, he could do 300 pounds on the bench press.

Even though they were competing with each other, Jack Wentworth and Al Spittles seemed to get along. They didn't try to steal each others' talent or trainees. As a matter of fact, after I began training, I would occasionally go to Al's gym just to work out with his guys. They would welcome me with open arms. I didn't go to Al's very often because they didn't have a ring, and since I wanted to be a professional, I wanted to do my workouts in the ring.

Jack took pride in providing his students and trainees with much more modern equipment than the equipment at Spittle's gym. He had weights and a ring in the center of the building. I was impressed with his facility and signed up for a 6-month training course that cost $300.

I had long, red hair, so one of the first things Jack said to me was, "You look like you could be Irish. Why don't we call you Red McNulty, the Irish Rogue."

The first thing that Jack required was that you build up your body, which was a good place to start. For the first six months, I did nothing but push the weights. I don't know if the human body could withstand Jack's wrestling and weight training regimens at the same time. At 183 pounds, I was already a big kid, but I gained up to 230 pounds during that time. Jack seemed to be impressed because I was in good shape. I could do a 300-pound bench press and well over 400 pounds on the squats. When I first got there, I struggled to bench 145 pounds.

Jack promoted wrestling matches at the school every Thursday night. We would push the weights back against the wall and set up enough chairs on the floor to accommodate 100 to 200 people. The price of admission was only a dollar, so a full house would net less than $200.

For the most part, the matches were between Jack's students, but many of the pros would stop by on their off nights to work out by wrestling against the young studs. Some of the guys he used, like Sailor Clark, Bull Johnson, and a cop from the area named Johnny Reed, were already pros. He didn't pay them to wrestle. They wrestled against Jack's students to help him make some extra money, or worked with each other on the main event to help draw people into the building. In lieu of payment, Jack would have beer in the dressing room for those who were of age, and soda pop for those who weren't.

While I was training, I tried to watch wrestling on TV as much as I could, but between work and training, my free time was restricted. I was a regular at the matches in Queenston, but until then, I had only been to two other live shows. The first time, I had gone to Hamilton to visit my brother, Roger, and we went to an outdoor show to see Ivan and Karol Kalmikoff wrestling against Yukon Eric and somebody else.

The second time, I was already living in Hamilton. Bulldog Brower was in the main event. I was in awe of Brower and amazed by his antics in the ring. He really looked the part for his gimmick. He wasn't very tall—about my height—but he weighed more than 300 pounds. He didn't have bodybuilding muscle, but he was thick and massive, and he had big, blue eyes. He had one of those terrific punches, like Bull Curry did. Brower would get his opponent in a headlock and pretend to hit him in the face with his fist, while popping his arm against his side for effect, making it sound like he really smacked the guy.

Of course, like everyone else who grew up around wrestling in Canada and the northeast part of the U.S., my favorite wrestler was Bruno Sammartino. Even though I was going to wrestling school, I was a big mark, and Bruno was my hero. I think being a fan worked to my benefit because I was excited about wrestling. The people who loved the business seemed to excel at wrestling more than those who didn't.

On the first show I attended at the gym in Queenston, Jack Wentworth and Johnny Reed, a police officer who sidelined as a wrestler, were the babyface team against Al Bell, a big man who stood 6-foot-5 and weighed about 350 pounds, and Sailor Clark. Clark had a bald head, a beard, and he was ugly. Actually, when you stop to think about it, he looked a lot like I do now.

In later years, after I had been wrestling, I always understood why the fans got caught up in a match and jumped into the ring to attack the bad guys, because on that night, I was absolutely mesmerized by the action in the ring. When Bell and Clark got the best of Jack—through underhanded means, of course—I poked my brother in the ribs and said, "Let's get them."

I don't remember doing it, but I jumped out of my seat and ran to the corner of the ring where Al Bell was standing, holding onto the tag rope. I reached up and proceeded to punch him in the stomach. I must have knocked the wind out of him a bit because he dropped to one knee and said, "Oh-hhhh."

Sailor Clark happened to see Al go down, so he got out of the ring and walked around to see what was happening. He had seen me at the gym, so he wasn't quite sure whether or not I was part of the wrestling show at that point. When he walked around the corner of the ring, I got scared, so I did what I saw the wrestlers do on television. I picked up a chair and hit him with it. I didn't pull it. I hit him hard. When he fell back, I charged into him and started punching away, until Jack Wentworth and some of the boys grabbed me. They were shouting, "Red! Red!"

Jack said, "Red, get out of here and come back tomorrow."

I could tell that Jack was angry, and I remember thinking, "Why is he mad at me? I was just trying to help him."

When I came back the next afternoon, Jack didn't say a whole lot about the incident. He simply said, "Red, you can't interfere with the matches. Go get your gear on. I have somebody who is going to begin training you to wrestle today."

I changed into my workout clothes and climbed up into the ring, excited about my opportunity to train as a wrestler. As I stood in the ring, all of the other trainees came out of the dressing room, followed by ... Sailor Clark.

Clark had a big knot on the top of his head. He only outweighed me by about 20 pounds, but he looked enraged. As he walked to the ring, he was hitting things. When he climbed into the ring, he kicked the ropes and glared at me like he intended to kill me. I learned later that he was trying to scare me so they could see whether I was going to stand up to him. Believe me when I tell you that he was very believable. I was terrified. I thought I was in line to take a terrible beating. No doubt, some of his rage might have been genuine. He couldn't have been too happy about the lump on his head from the shot he took from the chair the night before.

Sailor Clark gave me my first wrestling lesson that afternoon. He was certainly intimidating. After stretching me from one end of the ring to the other, he finally realized that I wasn't going to back down, regardless of how tough he made it on me, so he eased up a little. I admit that I was scared, but I was willing to take whatever beating he was going to dish out because I wanted to be a wrestler.

After the incident at the wrestling show, Morris decided to forgo a career in wrestling, but his decision didn't have anything to do with the incident. He met a young lady and got married at a very young age, an event which probably changed his direction and ambitions. It turned out to be a good decision because he's still with the same lady today.

In those days, we weren't immediately taught to work. We learned about wrestling holds, conditioning, and psychology. The workout with Sailor Clark was my first lesson in psychology. When we finished, Clark was very nice to me. Clark and Jack took me aside and talked to me about the incident on the night before. It was a good lesson.

The actual training at Jack's school consisted of showing me the professional holds and the methods of reversing them. We were taught how to put several combinations of holds and reversals together. We learned how to work our opponents' legs and arms. We learned how to hit the ropes. We learned all of the holds and we got a good round of teaching. A lot of

schools didn’t do that, but Jack took pride in his training regimen. The cardiovascular training, however, was left up to each individual student, who would train at the gym when they weren’t wrestling.

For the most part, the focus of the school was on psychology, rather than working. I often joke about the fact that to this day, I have never been smartened up to the business. In the ring at Jack’s school, and sometimes after I turned professional, I was fighting as hard as I could. When I was training, we were very aggressive. We were trying so hard to make our match look good that we would halfway shoot. Shooting was the best way to do it until you became good enough to make your work look real. Even after I had been in the business for years, I would occasionally misjudge a punch, and I would send my opponent reeling. Those mistimed punches weren’t intentional. I was just trying to make my business look as real as possible. Often, however, those mistakes resulted in what wrestlers called a "receipt," or payback. I’ve been on the receiving end of many of those receipts.

I’ve heard people say, "I saw him fall down, but the punch that was supposed to knock him down was three inches from his face." I had a good explanation for that. Have you ever been in a fight when somebody threw a fist at you? Your reaction is to duck backwards, which makes it easy to lose your balance and fall down. That actually happened to me, so I could truthfully use that as an explanation. Most people, however, only look at the point of impact.

That’s why people like (the late) Wahoo McDaniel and (the late) Johnny Valentine laid in their punches and chops. I always preferred to lay them in, or work stiff, as we called it in the business. I didn’t mind taking a receipt, either, as long as it wasn’t in the nose or the kisser. Even that happened at times, but you learned to deal with it. If it was a good receipt, it made it easier for me to return the favor the next time.

You can teach somebody the ropes of the business, but it really doesn’t hit home until they are actually in the ring, doing what they were trained to do. That’s why Jack Wentworth stressed the psychology aspect of the business. He wanted us to understand what we were trying to accomplish in the ring. He wanted us to protect the business. He explained it by saying, "Working

is like art, or like being a magician. You have to protect your methods and you don’t tell anybody the secret."

Some wrestling schools took the "I’m going to teach these guys the hard way" approach. They put their students through pain and humiliation. "If this guy sticks with it, I’ll have a good worker. If he’s not tough enough to deal with it, he can hit the road." I don’t look at it that way, and Jack Wentworth didn’t, either. When Jack accepted your $300 training fee, he felt like you were entitled to an opportunity to learn what the wrestling business was all about. Years later, I took the same approach when I trained people. I wasn’t going to take somebody’s money and deceive them by teaching them something that had nothing to do with professional wrestling. More than likely, if I did that, my trainee would wind up hurting somebody. That would reflect back on me and my methods of training.

There were a lot of amateur wrestlers who were trained to be tough guys in the ring, and they acted tough when they got into the ring to work. As a result, it stalled, or crippled, their professional career, because they couldn’t get the mentality of the amateur ranks out of their minds. However, since Vince McMahon Jr. changed the entire flavor of the wrestling business to "sports entertainment," that seems to be a thing of the past.

Jack Wentworth did lay down some ground rules, though. He said, "If you’re here to play around, I’d advise you to keep your money in your wallet, because you’ll be throwing your money away for nothing. I can’t decide for you, but if you’re serious about a career as a pro, then I’m here to train you. If you want to learn, then I want to teach you the correct way. It is important, however, that you keep what I say here at the school."

We never would have dreamed that things would be so different today. Now they have articles and films that teach you everything about the wrestling business. It’s a shame that things have progressed to that point because it took the mystique out of the business. There isn’t as much respect for the old-timers, either. I’ve heard students telling their instructors how to do things. That wouldn’t have happened in the old days.

At Jack’s school, there was camaraderie. We trusted each other to the point where we could have a very competitive match, and we learned all phases

of the business. One of us would be the good guy, while someone else would be the bad guy. When we finished our match, we would reverse our roles. We took turns as the referee, and we even learned how to be a manager. At the end of the night, Jack would pay us with soft drinks, or if you were of age, a beer. For the most part, even though he didn't forbid his students to drink, Jack was strict about the consumption of alcohol. He didn't want us showing up drunk.

I appreciate the time that Jack and the other boys spent helping me. The old-timers were so willing to teach me everything they knew. They gave me extra attention and worked with me on a one-on-one basis, far more than they did with anyone else. When I left the ring after a match, they would walk over and give me suggestions on ways that I could do things more effectively. I think they thought I had promise in the business because I worked hard and was very attentive. I felt that I had to. I knew that with my background, if I didn't make it in wrestling, I would probably never get anywhere in life.

My daily routine was to workout, go to work for Stelco, and wrestle whenever I could. That was my whole life. During the period of time that I was trying to gain weight, I would train hard and force feed myself. I would eat a big breakfast early in the morning. An hour or so later, I would drink a protein shake, which was a chalky liquid that tasted horrible. I would eat lunch, followed by another protein shake, a big dinner in the evening, and a protein shake before I went to bed. I also drank at least a gallon of milk each day. I did all of that between working out, going to work, and wrestling. It worked for me because I gained a lot of weight during my time at the school.

As far as I know, steroids weren't around in those days, but even when they became easy to get, I never took them. I did have a doctor who put me on prednisone for ten years to control a lung condition, but I never took steroids in order to gain weight or muscle mass.

One of the things they taught before we graduated was how to bleed. I remember watching matches as a teenager and never noticing anyone blading. I always thought the wrestlers got busted open from the blows to the head.

They showed us how to make a blade, how to carry it, and how to use it. Jack told me the best way to carry it was to tape it to my finger, but I thought that was dangerous. Another way was to put it into your trunks, but the blade could fall and it would be hard to find when it was time to use it, not to mention the damage it might do.

The other method was to carry it in my mouth, which is what I did for the better part of my career. The boys would ask me, "Aren't you afraid that you might accidentally swallow it?" I suppose that was a possibility, but it never happened.

When they first showed us how to use a blade, we were all nervous. We thought we'd bleed to death, or have to be rushed to the hospital. One day, when I had reached the point where I would have an actual match with one of the other students, Jack came to me and said, "I want you to get blood tonight. When the time comes, your opponent will knock you out of the ring. Slip underneath the ring and do it there."

I did exactly as I was told. I carried the blade in my trunks. When the time came, I fell to the floor and rolled underneath the ring. I was under the ring for about 30 seconds—much longer than I should have been—but it seemed like 30 minutes. The problem was, I couldn't find my blade! Sure enough, it had slipped down into the lower part of my trunks. My opponent was smart. He kept running to the ropes and breaking the referee's count.

When I finally found my blade, I realized that I didn't have any idea how hard to press it into my forehead. When I came out from under the ring, I only had a thin trickle of blood running down my forehead. I didn't get a lot of blood, but it was enough to pass Jack's inspection and allow me to graduate.

Towards the end of my career, I had advanced well beyond the use of a blade. I would get blood the hard way, which meant getting busted open by an opponent's knuckles, or with a solid object. Wahoo hit me with the ring bell one night and the point stuck in my forehead.

I never liked getting blood on other people, but some of the guys didn't want to do it themselves. One day, Steve Regal asked me to cut him on TV.

I did what he asked. He needed stitches for that one and it left a mess in the ring. Other guys used to tell me, "I'll carry the blade and get blood on you if you want."

My stock answer was always, "No, you won't."

My first outfit was pretty plain. I bought my first pair of trunks from one of the other wrestlers. I didn't like them because they were made of wool. They itched terribly and would stretch out of shape. Jack Wentworth gave me an address of a place where I could order boots. I wore an eye patch for a couple of weeks. For the last few days, I wore it to the ring, but took it off when I wrestled. I also got a cardboard suitcase from the Salvation Army, which I used for almost two years.

As Red McNulty, I wrestled as a heel. On occasion, they would put me against another heel, but I still worked heel. It's hard for anyone who doesn't know me personally to believe this, but I'm a naturally, quiet, shy person, so being a heel was uncomfortable for me. When people would yell at me, I would take it personally. Being a heel, however, was the best thing for me because it forced me out of my shell. I would actually holler back at the people.

For the first two years of my career, everybody called me Stone Face. I didn't think about showing any expression on my face because I was so focused on the technical aspect of my matches. You lose a lot if you don't use facial expressions when you wrestle. Later on, I realized how tough it was for a masked wrestler to get his match over with the audience. They couldn't rely on facial expressions to tell the story. They had to express themselves through their body movements. I was very nervous, too, and it took every bit of those two years for me to loosen up.

My first professional match outside of Hamilton was in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In 1965, I got a call from Phil Zacko, one of Vince McMahon Sr.'s partners. I'll never forget the phone call. He said, "Bull Johnson is sick and can't fill his bookings. Would you like to take his place on Pittsburgh TV?"

What else could I say but, "Sure."

That trip was a great experience. I was really nervous as I sat in the dressing room that night. I didn’t know who I was going to wrestle. All I knew was that I was having my first "real" match on the road. My apprehension grew considerably when somebody walked into the room and said, "Kid, you’ll be wrestling Bruno Sammartino."

I was dumbstruck. I couldn’t say a word. I was nervous just being there, so you can imagine how nervous I was after they told me that. I had been a big wrestling fan for most of my life, so I had seen Bruno on TV when he did promos for matches he had in Toronto. Bruno was the champion! Not only that, but he was my hero! I was going to wrestle my idol.

Shortly after they gave me the news, one of the boys walked in and said, "Hey, kid. You’re a big guy. If you want to make a name in this business, you have to get noticed. When Sammartino kneels down in the corner of the ring and makes the sign of the cross, attack him. Get your licks in. If you do that, you’ll look strong to the people."

I wanted to do the right thing, so I said, "Yes, sir."

I never did know if Bruno was in on the rib or not, but I’ll never forget the puzzled look on his face when he turned and looked at me as I charged across the ring. I gave him a stiff kick, drove him into the turnbuckle, and started to pound on him. I had been taught the philosophy of making my work look real, so I gave Bruno everything I had. Bruno wasn’t quite sure what to make of me. He came to his feet pretty quickly and put me in a bear hug to win the match.

It was about this time that I began having a serious relationship with a woman I met. She was much older than me, but she was comfortable with my dream of being a professional wrestler. After a couple of years, my first daughter, Doreal, was born.

Around the time that Doreal was born, we purchased a small farm about ten miles south of Hamilton. For a couple of years, while I was working shift work at Stelco, I also worked about 40 acres of grain. One day, while driving my rusted-out 1955 Buick to work, I fell asleep at the wheel when I was going around a curve in a small community. The road looped around a

house, but I drove straight up onto the porch, down the other side, and landed back on the road. I didn't hurt myself or the car, but it was just like something you would see on the old The Dukes of Hazzard television show.

I was driving the same car in an ice storm. Not only was I was driving too fast for the road conditions, but I was driving on bald tires. When I came to an intersection, I couldn't stop and slid right through, sideways. A policeman happened to be sitting at the corner. He was nice enough to give me a warning and let me go.

I didn't stay in the Hamilton school as long as I probably should have, but I remember Jack telling me, "Kid, you know enough that I'm going to get you some matches." He got me booked for five matches in New York and I would be paid $500 for those five shots. That was big money in those days, especially when you consider that I only made $100 a week working at Stelco. Even if the money situation was different, I knew Stelco wasn't the place where I wanted to spend my life. I wanted to pursue my dream.

As time passed, I became friends with quite a few people at Stelco. When a union steward job came open, I was unanimously voted in to take the spot. I don't know if being appointed union steward at Stelco was an honor or not. When you get right down to it, I was sort of pushed into the job because nobody else wanted to do it. Being well-liked by my fellow employees, I was a shoe-in for the job, but being uneducated and not experienced in that field at all, I was working at a disadvantage.

Whenever a problem came up between an employee and management, I had to stop whatever I was doing to argue over a small—and often stupid—point with management. I had to argue for the employees on each individual situation according to the rules in the union contract handbook. I'm sure I deciphered the rules incorrectly many times because I didn't understand the legal mumbo-jumbo that made up the contract. Of course, management would always refer to this article of the contract, or that article. I didn't care about the articles of the contract. If the issue had to do with a pair of work gloves, I would use my common sense and say something like, "Never mind the rules. Our friend here is complaining because he needs a new issue of gloves."

If the company wasn’t required to furnish gloves to employees, I would say, "He’s not abusing the gloves. It’s just that sparks fly up and hot metal ends burn the gloves. I know you’re not obligated to supply gloves, but if he burns his hands, you’re going to pay compensation for his injuries. It’s a safety issue that will wind up costing the company more than a few pairs of gloves."

Some of the biggest issues the workers faced were environmental and health concerns. For instance, one of the big complaints from the workers, especially the crane operators, was about the heat and smoke from the furnaces and torches. Heat and smoke rises, so the smoke collected in the ceiling, which made conditions terrible for those of us who were operating the cranes. The crane operators were trapped in a 4-foot by 6-foot box that floated down the tracks. At times, the smoke was so bad that you couldn’t breathe, let alone see. I even kept a journal with me. The smoke was excessively bad today and I had to close the window of the crane.

The workers on the floor also had a problem with the heat and smoke, as dust and debris continuously floated down from the ceiling.

I tried to reason with the company and explain the fact that we all needed to breathe clean air. I went back to the compensation argument. "If you don’t provide these men with some kind of a mask to filter out the particles of steel, you’re going to have a lot of compensation claims due to lung problems."

I had an argument with a superintendent who was complaining because the workers were asking for air conditioners in the break rooms. They just wanted a place to go during their breaks to get a breath of fresh air. The superintendent didn’t give in and we lost that case … at least, for the time being.

On one of my last days on the job, I was operating a crane. I was angry with the company because they had done nothing to improve the working conditions for the crane operators. The cranes weren’t air conditioned, and in the summer, sitting in the enclosed body of the crane was torture. You would be drenched with sweat after working for just a few minutes. I decided that in order to get things changed, I needed to get the attention of

the company. Of course, my criminal mind kicked in again as I thought of ways to make my point.

I said to the foreman, "Boy, I need to take a break. I feel dizzy."

He said, "Can you stay with it until you pick up one more load? You can take a break after you do that."

That was a mistake. As a representative of the company, he never should have asked me to continue driving heavy equipment when I had expressed feelings of lightheadedness, but he was concerned about the tonnage. I said, "Okay," and put the crane into gear.

I was moving down the tracks at full speed, which was only about five miles an hour, but when I hit the steel blocks at the end of the track, the wheels slipped off the tracks. It sounded like a bomb had exploded. Within a few seconds, all work had stopped and there was complete silence. The foreman came running down the tracks and yelled up to me, "What happened?"

"I almost passed out," I lied.

His second mistake was to tell me to walk down by myself. To get down from the crane, I had to climb up a ladder, walk across a bridge, and walk down two flights of stairs. When I was out of sight, I picked up a piece of tin and scratched my back. That was a tip I had picked up from the wrestling school, where I had learned to use a blade to gig myself. As I got to the bottom flight of steps, I "passed out" and fell down the few remaining steps into the steel gate at the bottom. I wasn’t hurt, but I worked it for all it was worth—the ambulance, the hospital, and the doctors. They took me to the hospital and gave me compensation for six weeks. I took the six-week sick leave and gave my notice when I returned to work.

From that story, I suppose you could say that I had my first work before I was actually in the business. Six months later, I heard that the company installed air conditioners in the cranes.

Before I left, I had to give my notice to my manager. I was entitled to sick leave, so I stayed on for a couple of weeks, then went in to talk to my manager. He tried to talk me out of quitting, but I had made up my mind. I collected the few belongings I kept there and walked out. I can still remember what a good feeling I had when I left.

When I made the decision to leave Stelco, I had not saved a lot of money, partly because of situations in my personal life. I had a car payment, training fees at the wrestling school, gym fees, and since I was eating like a horse in order to gain weight, huge food bills. I wasn't in debt, but there wasn't a lot of money to spare or save. I had some holiday pay coming, so that helped get me through the first few days of unemployment. When that money was gone, I contemplated doing a lot of crazy things to get the money I needed to continue to pursue my career in wrestling. I even considered hitting a guy over the head and taking his paycheck. Thanks goodness I never followed through on any of those thoughts, but even though I didn't, I still had the mindset of a criminal.

On the first night of my five-day trip to New York, I wrestled in Scranton, Pennsylvania against Tony Pugliese in a match with a 15-minute time limit. Tony came back to my dressing room, complaining about me being so stiff. "Kid!" he said. "You don't have to kill a guy to make it look real, and if you're going to hold your opponent so hard, you'll tire out faster."

That was one of my first lessons outside of Jack Wentworth's school. I had learned a lot in Jack's school, but I learned a lot more when I started to wrestle in front of people. There is no substitute for experience in front of a live crowd.

My second match was against Big Bill Miller, who placed fourth in the NCAA championships as an amateur wrestler at Ohio State University.. Bill was a giant of a man. He weighed more than 300 pounds. I tried to get into position to beal him across the ring. A beal is a move where you stand beside your opponent, facing the same direction, and put your arm underneath their arm from the front to the rear. You take two steps across the ring and throw him. Your opponent goes into the air, does a flip, and lands on his back. Since Bill was so much taller than I was, I couldn't get my arm up to his armpit, so I put my hand underneath his arm and went

through the motions of throwing him across the ring. Bill flew through the air and landed with his feet through the other turnbuckle. I thought I had messed up again by being too rough, so I ran over to him and whispered, "I’m sorry, sir. I didn’t mean to do that."

Much to my surprise, Bill was struggling to keep from laughing. Later on, he laughingly told me that he did it to himself. Bill was such an athlete that he made it look as if I had thrown him across the ring, when in fact, he did all of the work himself. For the remainder of the match, Bill flew around the ring for me, making me feel like I was actually throwing him around. Things like that made me feel like I was in a dream.

I was quiet and somewhat shy, so both Miller and Pugliese were very helpful. They could tell that I was serious about the business because I worked out hard and tried to learn as much as possible when I was in the ring.

After that, I wrestled on TV in Washington, D.C., and then I went back to New York, where I was going to wrestle at Madison Square Garden. Unfortunately, I didn’t arrived in New York early enough to wrestle. I’m not sure whether I forgot, or if the office just didn’t tell me, but before I could get my wrestling license, I was supposed to get an electrocardiogram with the New York athletic commission doctor. I didn’t get to New York on time, so I missed the opportunity. I remember sitting in the dressing room, feeling so depressed.

It was January 24, 1966. Baron Mikel Scicluna was wrestling Bruno in the main event that night. I remember being impressed by Mike, who did hundreds of pushups, leg raises, and sit-ups, in the dressing room before his match. When Mike stopped for a few seconds between reps, he said, "Hey, kid. Aren’t you gonna get your clothes on?"

I explained that I hadn’t been able to get to the commission on time, so I wouldn’t be able to wrestle. "The worst part of it is that I’m not going to get paid, and I’m leaving for Canada tomorrow."

I’m not sure whether Bruno overheard my conversation with Mike, or if somebody told him, but he walked up to me later that night and held out a

$50 bill. "Here, kid," he said. "Take it."

Bruno doesn’t remember that incident, but it made an indelible impression on young Red McNulty. I remember being so impressed that my hero was a nice man in real-life.

I don’t know if Bruno went into his pocket or if he got it from Vince, but he gave me $50. That’s the type of person he was, and is today.

I was so gung-ho about just being in the wrestling business. At the time, I didn’t picture myself ever becoming famous or becoming champion. I didn’t even think I’d be able to wrestle on TV. The first time that I did wrestle on TV, I thought, "Wow! I’m on TV!" It was such a thrill. I thought I had made it to the big time.

I also got a few shots on television in the Toronto territory. In fact, the first time my parents saw me wrestle on television, they were still living in Ottawa, but they saw me wrestle on Toronto TV. They told me about it the next time I called them. They were worried that I might get hurt, of course, but they were thrilled to see me actually wrestling.

One of the TV matches I had there was with John Foti, a veteran wrestler who had been in the business for a long time. We wrestled for fifteen minutes. Lord Athol Layton was doing the commentary. When I got out of the ring, he stopped me and said, "Well, kid. You did very well. You stayed in there with a veteran for the time limit. Do you think you could have done better?"

I was nervous because he caught me off-guard. I had never done an interview before. I blurted out, "Well, I don’t know if I could have done better. He’s a veteran, he’s more experienced, and he knows the promoter."

When I said that, I felt bad because I felt like I exposed the business by saying what I did. I should have said he had more experience and left it at that, but when I added "he knows the promoter," it sounded to me almost as an expose. Afterwards, I apologized to Lord Layton. He said, "Kid, don’t worry about it! You did fine. You have to ad lib out there."

When I left Hamilton, I didn’t see myself having much opportunity to wrestle in Toronto on a regular basis because the people had seen me doing jobs [losing matches] on Hamilton TV. I thought I would have a better opportunity if I headed west, so I went to Vancouver, British Columbia.

Chapter 7
The Cat in the Frying Pan

Before making the trip to Vancouver, I drove my car to Ottawa, which was almost 300 miles in the opposite direction of where I wanted to go, but I wanted to visit my family before I traveled so far west. During the time I spent with my family, I decided that I wasn't going to take my car, so I sold it to a junk dealer. I regretted that later, but at the time, I thought it would be best to sell it and take a train to Ottawa.

The 2,100 mile trip to British Columbia was three days and two nights through some of the most beautiful scenery in the world. I met some students who were going to University and we drank beer the entire trip. By the end of the second day, I was pretty tired. Between the hangovers and the frequent, jarring stops of the train, it was hard to get any real sleep.

When I stepped down off the train in Vancouver, I didn't have a clue about what I was going to do, so the first thing I did was find a cheap, boarding house in which to live. On my second day there, I walked downtown to the Blackstone Hotel. I knew a lot of wrestlers stayed there, so I thought I might spot somebody that I could ask for help. Sure enough, as I walked into the hotel, Chris and John Tolos came walking out. I had never met the Tolos brothers, but I had seen them wrestle on television. At first, they must have thought I was a real mark because I was all excited. I had seen them wrestle in Hamilton and Toronto, but that was my first opportunity to talk to them. I walked up and introduced myself as Red McNulty, telling them that I had come to Vancouver to get into wrestling. "Who's the promoter here?" I asked.

"Sandor Kovacs," John said. "How long have you been wrestling?"

"I've been wrestling for a couple of years, but I haven't had a lot of matches. Most of them were in Jack Wentworth's school."

"Well, when you talk to Sandy, don’t tell him that you only wrestled a few times. You look good, so let on that you’ve been wrestling for a couple of years and that you’re experienced. Here’s Sandy’s phone number. I’ll call him tonight and tell him to be expecting your call."

Sandor Kovacs was the booker. At the time, I weighed 250 to 260 pounds. When Sandor saw me, he booked me without asking too many questions. From that day on, we always got along well.

I worked in Vancouver from May 1966 through the end of 1967, although I also made short trips to Portland, Calgary, and Japan, during that time. In those early days in Vancouver, I worked with people like Timmy Geohagen, Eric Froelich, Rene Goulet, Frank Marconi, Paul Jones, Paddy "Pat" Barrett, and Woody Farmer. Later on, I had the opportunity to work with great talent like Roy McClarty, Don Leo Jonathan, Dutch Savage, and Rocky Johnson. I didn’t have a problem with anybody while I was in that territory. Everybody wanted to have a good match.

Unfortunately, I only got booked two or three times a week. I didn’t let that discourage me, though. I remember Rod Fenton, the promoter, telling me, "Kid, if you want to get ahead in the business, you need to carry your bag with you all the time. Never, ever, go anywhere without your wrestling gear."

I would show up at the matches with my cardboard suitcase, that I had bought at the Salvation Army, whether I was booked or not, just in case somebody didn’t show up. I didn’t have a car, so most of the time, just in the hope of getting booked, I would hitchhike to the towns. Eric Froelich can vouch for me on that.

When Rod Fenton saw that I was determined to make a living in the business, Rod started to use me even when I wasn’t booked. He would say, "Ah, let’s just add another match to the card and use the kid." Of course, for the first six years or so, I did jobs for everybody, but that didn’t bother me. I was learning the business and getting better with every match. After the first year, Rod started to book me five or six times a week.

I laugh when I look at the list of my matches during the first three years of my career. I wrestled four or five nights a week and wound up with two wins and ten draws. The rest of my matches were all losses. I had to correct Scott Teal when he called it my win-loss record. I told him to keep it simple and call it my loss record.

Jack Bence, who traveled with Haystack Calhoun and served as his road manager, didn't win many matches, either, but he always gave 100% when he was in the ring and he made his opponents look like main eventers. I tried to do the same thing for the first six years that I was in the business.

My whole career was a learning process. Nobody ever gets to a point where they know it all, even though there were people who thought they did. There is always something new to learn. In the early days, I had trouble learning some of the holds. I think all wrestlers go through that, but for most of us, it was just a matter of putting enough time in to learn the holds. Eventually, you don't even have to think about the way to apply the holds. It becomes a natural reaction to move from a headlock to a standing wristlock, and from a waistlock to a full Nelson. I had to learn the counters to the holds, and after awhile, I would move from one to the other automatically. In all, it took me a good six years to feel comfortable enough to be a main eventer. That was six years of steady work, eventually wrestling seven to eight times a week, not six years of wrestling one time every other weekend.

And, of course, in addition to the time factor, I got a lot of help from a lot of guys. I wrestled Don Leo Jonathan at New Westminster Arena one night. He won two straight falls—the first by disqualification, the second by pinfall. Don Leo was such a great athlete that he made me look like I was winning the whole match. The people thought I was beating the daylights out of him. That's the sign of a real pro, and Don Leo was exactly that.

When I became a main eventer is when I got polished, and all aspects of the business began to come together for me. Jacques Rougeau and Billy Robinson were great teachers. They would put you into different holds and make you work to counter those holds. If you wanted to stay ahead of them, you had to be a student of the game. My education didn't end there. As I began to get comfortable with the American style, I began wrestling people

from Europe, Japan, and Australia, all of which had different styles. You had to be adaptable to whatever situation came up.

I wrestled Rocky Johnson, the father of the Rock [Dwayne Johnson], as early as 1967. Rocky was a great worker, a dropkick artist who could fly like a butterfly. As a matter of fact, he had two birds tattooed on his chest. He could make his chest muscles go up and down, making it look like the birds were flying. The wrestling fans loved it when he did that. Of course, I also wrestled Rock's granddad, Peter Maivia, in California in the late '70s. I wasn't there when it happened, but I heard stories about the riot that took place at the San Francisco Cow Palace. It took ten policemen, armed with billy-clubs and mace, to subdue Peter.

Wrestling on an Indian reservation was one of the highlights of my Red McNulty days. The conditions were terrible. In the building where the matches were held, they had deer carcasses hanging from the rafters, waiting to be butchered. The dressing room was nothing more than an old tent. It was a terrible situation. I had been to a lot of buildings that didn't have shower facilities. In those cases, we would wait and shower at the motel. At this reservation, however, they told us to get naked and the squaws would wash us off with a hose. No thanks!

I lived in a boarding house during my stay in Vancouver. I worked out at a gym on Broad Street, not too far from where I lived. It was there that I met a young man named Dale Hey. He only weighed 220 pounds at the time, and yet, he could squat 535 pounds and bench press 435. Dale was only 17 years old, but we hit it off and became friends. After a few weeks of hanging around together, he said, "How would you like a job as a bouncer? You can pick up $25 a night."

I wasn't booked every weekend, especially during the first year, so I took him up on his offer. I saw it as an opportunity to supplement my income on the nights that I wasn't wrestling. I even worked at the Hollywood Bowl when Ike and Tina Turner came in. The Bowl was a club in New Westminster, British Columbia, where Ike and Tina Turner and other stars entertained. They had a dance every weekend and would pack 400 to 500 kids into that stadium. Our job was to check them for booze and make sure no fights broke out.

One night, a guy wouldn't let me frisk him, so I refused to let him into the building. When he tried to walk in, anyway, I tried to stop him, and he took a swing at me. When I pulled him back outside, he continued to fight, so I hit him in the mouth, cutting my hand on his teeth in the process. He fell down and hit his head on the concrete sidewalk. When the police arrived, they took both of us to the hospital. The hospital was pretty crowded, so they had to put us in the same room … side by side.

Dale and I made some wild trips. One club was having trouble with a group of rowdy kids, so we were hired to come in and clean up the area. That's exactly what we did. We intimidated them and they got the message.

Another time, a guy hired me because he was being threatened by somebody. He knew I was a wrestler, so he gave me $250 to act as his bodyguard for a couple of weeks. I wanted the $250, but I wasn't crazy, so I took Dale along with me. Dale and I lived at my client's hotel for the duration of my contract. My client pointed out the guy to me and told us that he wanted us to break the guy's arm if he showed up at his bar. He wanted to put a scare into him. Fortunately, the guy got wind of us being there and he never came back, so I didn't have to break his arm. We did have a lot of fun while we were there, drinking beer and having a good time.

Of course, as bouncers, we made a few enemies when we had to throw people out because of things they did. Don Morrison, who later wrestled as Lumberjack Luke, got picked on in the parking lot by six guys. We weren't around to help him and he got beaten up pretty badly. His nose and lips were bloody and they kicked him in the ribs. His injuries were bad enough that he had to go to the hospital. He came back to work after he recovered, but we never did get our hands on the guys who did it because we couldn't identify them.

Dale wanted to be a wrestler, so in return, I started training him—not in the gym, but in Stanley Park, a private park. I didn't know a whole lot myself at the time, but I knew enough that I was very impressed with Dale's talent. He was a good athlete who didn't take long to learn the holds and counters. Of course, Dale went on to have a great career in professional wrestling as Buddy Roberts, teaming with Jerry Brown as the Hollywood Blondes, and

as one of the Fabulous Freebirds with Terry Gordy and Michael Hayes. Dale turned into a very good worker. He was very agile and much stronger than he looked.

One funny incident took place when we were practicing wrestling holds in Stanley Park. We picked a spot in a wooded area that we thought would be private. In order to show Dale how to do an inverted back breaker, I hoisted him up onto my shoulders. As I did, a bald-headed man with a large handlebar moustache walked out of the bushes that were hiding us. We were surprised to see him, but he looked just as surprised as we were. To make the matter even more embarrassing, the seat of my pants suddenly ripped out. The man spoke first, saying, "Hi, guys. Don’t worry. I’m a wrestler, too. My name is Matt Burns."

Dale and I introduced ourselves, but we thought he was ribbing us, especially when he used a name like Matt Burns. It wasn’t until years later that I heard that there was a wrestler who went by that very name.

So I guess he had told us the truth.

I enjoyed the time I spent with Dale. We got along well and had a lot of similar interests, most of which consisted of partying.

I was still wrestling as Red McNulty when I made my first trip to Japan. Don Leo Jonathan and Dutch Savage arranged the tour for me. I went over for the original group, the Japanese Wrestling Association, which was the wrestling promotion in Japan before Giant Baba and Antonio Inoki formed their own companies.

Danny Hodge was on that trip. I had a lot of respect for Danny. I weighed about 270 pounds and I was pretty strong, so I enjoyed doing what we called Indian wrestling. While in a standing position, with the outsides of your corresponding feet set together, you face your opponent and interlock your right hands, then try to unbalance each other. I did that with Danny nearly every day. Danny only weighed about 220 pounds, but I couldn’t push him around. He definitely showed me that he was the stronger of the two of us.

I learned one other thing on that first tour of Japan. When you go to Japanese clubs, the girls would come to your table and sit down, hoping you would buy a drink for them. The other wrestlers smartened us up to the fact that the club owners hired the girls to hustle foreigners and get them to buy more drinks. If you invited a girl to sit down, pretty soon, she would be drinking one drink after another, and it was all going on your tab. And more than likely, the drinks were watered down, so you would be paying big money for nothing. I was glad that I had been smartened up to that scam early in the tour.

One of the guys on the tour was Jacques Rougeau, the brother of Johnny Rougeau, who promoted the Montreal territory with Jack Britton. Jacques and I became friends during the seven-week tour and we spent a lot of time together. He liked the way I wrestled. He was impressed because I had gained up to about 270 pounds, and yet I was still able to take big bumps.

One day, he said, "How would you like to wrestle in Montreal?"

That was an easy question for me to answer, so I answered with another question. "Do you think that would be possible?"

"My brother is the promoter there," he laughed. "I'll give him a call and see if he's interested."

The next day, Jacques told me that Johnny had booked me for a date two months away.

When I talked to Johnny Rougeau on the phone, he said, "I've never seen you work, but I'm taking my brother's word for it that you can get the job done. I want to give you a new gimmick. Is that alright?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Would you consider shaving your head and growing a beard?"

"I don't have any problem with that."

"Good. From what I've seen, you look like Lenin. I'd like you to wrestle as a Russian. You also remind me of a guy who wrestled in the '30s and '40s named Dan Koloff. Why don't we call you Ivan Koloff?"

During the interim, I went back to Vancouver and worked through the end of 1967. The last thing Sandor said to me before I left was, "Hey, kid. Don't burn any bridges."

I didn't heed his advice because, as you'll see as my story unfolds, that's all I did my entire career! Promoters expected a lot out of us, and they would take advantage of us. Many times, I rebelled against that kind of treatment. I probably paid the price for burning those bridges, but it never kept me from being a main eventer or being able to work. There was a time when a business decision made it tough for me to get booked for a period of time, but I'll explain more about that later.

In January 1967, I went to Calgary to work for Stu Hart. When I got there, I told him about Dale Hey [Buddy Roberts]. "I was wondering if you'd be interested in bringing in a young guy I trained. He has a lot of potential."

Stu said, "I'll call him and … ecchh … see if he'd like to come out."

Dale jumped at the opportunity. Stu didn't pay Dale very much, so for the month we were there, Dale lived in Stu Hart's basement. I lived in a motel room with my wife and there just wasn't enough room for three people, so he chose to stay in Stu's basement. It was nice of Stu to offer because he already had a full house with 12 kids of his own.

I had my first opportunity to wrestle Stu Hart during that time. I had heard the stories about how he taught respect for the business by punishing young wrestlers, so I was surprised when he didn't stretch me! Stu's idea of teaching the young guys respect was to make them squeal and cry for mercy. I had warned Dale about watching Stu and not letting him get him into a hold. Stu would lure a young guy into his trap by saying, "Let me … ecchh … show you this hold."

Stu was generous and had us up for breakfast, which he cooked himself. I was surprised to see that he took such authority in the kitchen. I can

remember him reaching for the frying pan, only to find that their cat was sleeping in it. He yelled at the cat and shooed it away. After wiping down the frying pan with the sleeve of his shirt, he proceeded to cook a breakfast of eggs and bacon.

I only made a couple of hundred dollars a week, but back then, I looked at an opportunity to work as being extra experience. After my first week, I picked up my check and noticed that it was five dollars short. I remember it just like it was yesterday. I approached Stu and asked him about it. He said, "Ecch … well, I guess … ecch … I forgot to put that extra five dollars in there. Ehh … Don't worry, kid. I'll get Helen to add it on next week."

When the next week came around, it was the same scenario. My payoff was five dollars short. I had to pay a visit to Stu again. That happened every week for the four weeks that I was there. I don't think I ever got the twenty dollars back. I know that it really didn't have anything to do with the money. It was just Stu and his sense of humor. Years later, after I had made a name for myself in wrestling, I was talking to Stu on the telephone. I said, "Stu, where's that twenty dollars?"

"What twenty dollars?"

He didn't know what I was talking about, so I had to remind him.

Stu might have done it to see if I was the kind of guy who would talk up for my deal.

My beautiful cardboard suitcase bit the dust in Calgary after a 500-mile trip. When Stan Stasiak and I got out of the car, I accidentally dropped it and he stepped on it. We both laughed and started to jump around on it. I knew that it had served its purpose and that it was time I bought a decent suitcase. I can't say for sure, but I might have dropped it accidentally "on purpose."

This all took place during a time when wrestlers really had to scrimp to make a living. The promoters, for the most part, weren't known for being generous. When we were on the road, we really had to budget our money. We stayed in some dumpy places for $15 a night! The rooms were dirty and had none of the amenities that people expect from motels today.

I remember wrestling at New Westminster Arena in British Columbia and getting paid $17.50 ... in change! That kind of money was par for the course.

We also didn’t get paid for wrestling on television ... unless we lost! If we won our match, we didn’t get paid. Consequently, everybody wanted to lose! And even if you did lose, you only got paid $15, which doesn’t sound like much, but it would be comparable to $100 today.

Long hours on the road and the demands of the business, however, would put a strain on anybody’s relationship. Even in the Vancouver area, where I didn’t work a full schedule, I would be gone on Friday and Saturday. When my bookings picked up, I would return home on Sunday, but the chances were good that I would be back on the road early Monday morning.

When I left Calgary, I went to Hamilton to see my brothers. I hadn’t seen them in several years, so we spent most of the evening partying. We did a lot of drinking and were having what [at the time] I considered to be great fun. In preparation for my new Russian gimmick, we shaved my head that night—while we were drunk. When I woke up the next morning, my head was covered with tiny pieces of toilet paper. We must have used an entire roll. We had really butchered up my head. It was the middle of winter and the cuts were very noticeable against my white head.

I left for Montreal that morning, making the trip across country in a convertible—and the heater went out. It was 30 degrees below zero, before wind chill.

Chapter 8
Speaking Russian

The Rougeaus were very nice to me. They helped me get a room in a hotel and brought me into the wrestling office, telling me what they were looking for and what they had planned for me.

For my first appearance, they wanted me to run from the dressing room to the ring just before the ring announcer introduced my opponent to the audience. While his name was being announced, I was supposed to run around the ring three or four times. When they announced my name, I would jump into the ring, batter my opponent senseless in the matter of a few minutes, and put him in an inverted backbreaker. When the bell rang signaling the end of the match, I would jump out of the ring, run around it three or four times, and then run back to the dressing room.

I blew up [ran out of breath] badly at first and I realized that I wasn't in the cardiovascular shape that I needed to be in, but by doing that every night, I got into good shape. When you do that every night for years, you can't help but build your endurance, even for a guy who weighed 280 pounds.

I did that running around the ring gimmick the whole time I was in the Montreal territory. The people really thought I was a mad Russian. The gimmick helped because my shy personality was lacking in the ring.

I took ideas for my "Russian" accent from Maurice "Mad Dog" Vachon—my idol. I had watched Mad Dog on TV and admired his rough manner, and the way he talked with a broken French accent. I adapted that into what I thought a Russian would sound like if he were just learning to speak English.

I wrestled Mad Dog while I was there. He became a good friend who taught me a lot about the wrestling business. He was a heel, but the audience

cheered him because he was a local. They weren’t going to cheer for a Russian. He led me through the match and said, "Hit me with the chair!"

When I didn’t pick up the chair quickly enough, he picked it up for me … and smashed it over my head. He said, "Now take it away from me and hit me with it!"

He had used a great deal of force when he slammed the chair on my head, and he expected me to give it back in full measure.

Montreal was quite a learning experience and I’ll always be grateful to the Rougeaus for opening the door for me. Johnny told me that they wanted me to be a main eventer, so I was in a spot where I had to learn and progress. They didn’t expect me to become a polished wrestler overnight, but they wanted to see me improving. That wasn’t too hard to do because I wrestled a lot of the old-timers and main-event talent. Quite often, I was programmed against either Johnny Rougeau or Jacques Rougeau, or in a tag team match with a partner against both of them.

Until I went to Montreal, I wrestled on the bottom of the card. Even then, I seldom ever won a match. Guys in that position didn’t do interviews, so doing promos was still new to me. Fortunately, Tony Angelo and the Rougeaus coached me along.

When I got to Montreal, I felt comfortable with the holds and the moves, but I was ready for somebody to begin teaching me about ring psychology. Johnny Rougeau, Maurice "Mad Dog" Vachon, and Don Leo Jonathan all helped me a lot. I also respected Dutch Savage, but I didn’t get much help from him because we were both heels. Heels didn’t usually help other heels because they were afraid they would take their spot.

If I was asked, "What one person would you like to visit today?," I would have to say Don Leo. As far as being agile and nimble in the ring, he was the elite of big men. He could do things that small men couldn’t do.

I also met a lot of talented, old timers in Montreal—Larry Moquin, Tony Baillargeon, and Randy Savage’s dad, Angelo Poffo. I remembered being so impressed over the fact that Angelo was in the Guinness Book of World

Records for doing 6,033 sit-ups, non-stop, in 4 hours 10 minutes. After reading that, I went home with the intention of seeing how many I could do. After doing a hundred, I really felt a burn. To do 6,033, you would have to be in fantastic shape. His sons, Randy and Lanny, took after Angelo and always kept themselves in tip-top condition.

As I look back over some of the matches I had in 1968, my record looks much better than it did in the early days of my career. I can't believe I was given wins over so many top guys. After just five years in the business, I was main eventing against guys like Bulldog Brower, Eric the Red, Edouard Carpentier, Whipper Billy Watson, Gino Brito, Argentine Apollo, Johnny Rougeau, and Mighty Igor. I wrestled Gene Kiniski when he was the world champion. That was a real treat for me because Kiniski had been a big name throughout Canada when I was just a youngster.

My younger sister, Jarmaine, came to see me when I wrestled in Hull, Quebec. That night, I was wrestling Abdullah the Butcher. Abby was a heat magnet. I think the idea of both of us [supposedly] being from foreign countries—Abby from the Sudan, me from Russia—and being at odds, really got the attention of the fans. Prior to that, we had been tagged together, but we had a falling-out and the promoters billed it as a grudge match. Abby wrestled Dale Hey one week and came back against me the following week. When I started to bleed during the match, my sister ran down to the ring. She was ready to go toe-to-toe with Abby. Without letting the people know, I whispered, "It's okay. I'll talk to you about it later."

When the matches were over, I had to explain to her: "Don't ever get upset and worry about me. We know what we're doing and it looks worse than it really is. And please don't ever interfere because you could get hurt."

I don't know whether she bought my explanation or not because she looked worried, but that's how convincing our matches were in those days. The people would get into the action to the extent that they would want to get involved in the match. At times, that bothered me, but looking back on it, the fact that they were so involved was a compliment. We didn't just go through the motions of wrestling. We put so much intensity into our matches that, even though it didn't look like a real fight would look in similar circumstances, it was something the people could get into. We

would lay in the blows aggressively so the people would say, "Wow, he really hit him hard that time!"

Verne Gagne, Mad Dog Vachon, Wahoo McDaniel, and many of the veterans worked that way. If you didn't work a stiff style, they would chastise you because they felt you weren't giving the fans their money's worth. I was trained the opposite way, but when I got into the ring with the old-timers, I had to be able to go either way. If you had somebody who didn't like it too rough, then you had to be a good enough worker to convince the people that what you were doing was real. To this day, I still like the rough style. You should be in good enough shape to take a good boot to the chest, or a stiff elbow to the side of the head. If a person is going to cry about somebody being too stiff, then they're in the wrong business.

A few weeks after my debut match in Montreal, I wrestled Tony Angelo. A few months later, Tony did a promo, telling the people that he was impressed by my power and wrestling skills. He announced that he had bought my contract, and from that day forward, he would be my manager. Tony was good when it came to promos. He wore sunglasses and carried a briefcase, which made him look like a member of the Mafia.

While in Montreal, I wrestled Andre the Giant in single matches, tag team matches, and handicap matches—three on one. If Andre liked you, he loved you, but if he didn't like you, you had better watch it in the ring.

One of the guys that Andre wrestled in New York weighed more than 400 pounds. When the guy cut his promo, he said, "Tonight, we're going to find out who the real giant is."

Andre didn't like him saying that, and that night, he showed the guy who the real giant was. After a few minutes in the ring, the guy was literally crying out for help because Andre was hurting him.

I always got along well with Andre because I would buy him drinks when we went to the bars. When I say we went to the bars, I don't mean that we went together, or even sat at the same table. As a rule, the babyfaces and heels wouldn't be caught dead together in public, but if Andre and I were at the same club, I would send over drinks to his table, or pick up his tab.

Andre loved his beer! One night, after drinking several quarts, he went into my bathroom and fell into my tub!

"Hey, boss! Hey, boss!"

Andre didn’t let things like that bother him. He just laughed it off.

He was very powerful, too. During one of our matches, I went behind him and tried to lift him up. He retaliated by backing me into a corner and leaning his full weight against me and chuckled. He wasn’t going to hurt me. In fact, he was chuckling the whole time, but he was so heavy that it felt like I was being crushed.

Years later, Jacques Rougeau brought me back to Montreal to do interviews for an upcoming match against Andre. I felt honored that they picked me to wrestle Andre. Jacques said, "When you start to talk about Andre, he’ll walk in and interrupt you. Pick up a chair and smash him over the head with it."

I did exactly what Jacques asked me to do, but I misjudged the distance and power of my swing. When I hit Andre, he fell face first onto the announcer’s table, and the blood started to flow. I knew that I had screwed up and I honestly thought he was going to kill me, so when he lifted his head and stood up, I started to back up. This time, however, I was backing up for real. I shouldn’t have worried because Andre loved it! The fans loved it, too, because they filled the arena for our match.

I was so thrilled when I got to tag with Hans Schmidt in Montreal. One funny incident that took place during a match with Hans stands out in my mind. Hans and I were wrestling Bepo and Geto Mongol in what we later discovered was Bepo’s first match. Bepo, of course, was the wrestler who later became well known as Nicolai Volkoff. Bepo, who is originally from Croatia, thought I could speak Russian. All during the match, he kept trying to tell me things in Russian. Of course, I didn’t understand one single word of what he was saying. Finally, in exasperation, he asked me in English, "Are you stupid?"

As I looked at him, all I could think of to say was simply, "Yes."

We both started laughing.

On another night, I had Ernie Ladd as my tag team partner, and we were involved in an incident that turned out to be quite serious, and almost deadly. We were working against the Rougeau brothers in Chicoutimi, Quebec. The match was a two-out-of-three fall match for the tag team championship. The crowd was very angry when Ernie and I were disqualified in the first fall and we had a lot of heat. After we won the second fall, a riot started and the ring started to fill up with chairs. Ernie, who had a lot of experience in dangerous situations like that growled, "Grab a chair and use it as a shield. Follow me back to the dressing room."

I had never been in a riot like that and I was very nervous. As we flew down a short flight of steps, I was just a few feet behind Ernie as he went into the dressing room. Just before reaching the relative safety of the room, I took a quick peek back over my shoulder to see a mountain of about 50 chairs in the ring … but looking back proved to be a mistake. Not more than a second after I looked back, a chair flew through the air and caught me on the right side of my nose, cutting it very badly. Of course, real men don't get stitches. I made a butterfly bandage out of adhesive tape and closed the gash.

Other promoters began to hear about the big Russian in Montreal, so on open dates, Johnny Rougeau and Jack Britton would book me out to other territories. I would fly into Detroit to work with Bobo Brazil at Cobo Hall, and I made occasional shots into Toronto and St. Louis.

The shows at the Keil Auditorium in St. Louis were held on Friday nights. Early the next morning, they taped the television show at the Chase Hotel. One morning, I was booked with Harley Race in a tag team match. I had drunk too much after Friday night's show, so I wasn't really in any condition to wrestle.

During the match, when I climbed up onto the top rope to jump off, I lost my balance and fell all the way to the studio floor, landing flat on my back. As if nothing out of the ordinary had happened, I jumped right back up to my feet. One of our opponents threw me into the ring, back-dropped me, and draped me for the pin. I kicked out at the count of two, but I laid there

motionless for several seconds, as if I was hurt. I think it was just a reaction from being surprised that I wasn’t hurt from the fall outside the ring.

When I got back to the dressing room, Harley said, "What was that? You fell onto your back from the top rope, a fall that should have sent you to the hospital, and hopped right back up, but when your opponent back-drops you, THAT knocks you out?"

I didn’t have a good answer, so I just said, "I guess I was just in shock."

Once again, a few weeks after I got settled in Montreal, I talked the Rougeaus into bringing Dale Hey into the territory. Dale had learned enough by then to be able to put together a good match. He had learned to do some great moves, like dropkicks and flying head scissors. By this time, Dale had learned the value of psychology. He was a very good babyface.

I wrestled him one night in Sherbrooke. We had an exciting match. We brought the people up to their feet, set them back down, then brought them back up. There was so much heat at the finish that the fans were ready to climb into the ring.

It’s not a good idea to drink before a match, but that night, Dale and I drank four or five beers while we drove to the arena. When one hapless fan did find his way into the ring, the combination of the alcohol in my system and the noise in the arena led me to fight him. The result of my precipitous action was that some legal papers were served and we went to court. At the time, I thought I had acted in self-defense. Again, at the time, I didn’t understand or appreciate the fact that the people were upset because we had stirred them up by our convincing actions in the ring. When I hired a lawyer and found some witnesses who would testify that the guy had gotten into the ring with the intent of attacking me, he backed off and withdrew the suit. Unfortunately, even though we didn’t go to court, I still had to pay my lawyer, and it cost me a good bit of money.

Whenever I had to go to Quebec City from Montreal, and a bad storm was forecast, I would leave early. I was bound and determined to be there for the matches. One time, I wanted to spend the day of the matches looking at the annual ice sculpturing contest by the St. Lawrence River. The storm was so

bad that the matches were cancelled, so after looking at the sculptures, I thought I'd try to make my way back to Montreal. By that time, the storm had let up to a degree, but I didn't realize that the highway had been closed. By the time I had driven just one block, I realized what a mistake it was to think that I could make it back home. The roads were slick, snow was piled high on both sides, and there were accidents as far as the eye could see.

I quickly realized that I had to find a place to stay until things cleared up, but before I could get off the road, a car rolled through the intersection at a high rate of speed and slid into the passenger side of my car. After the police arrived and we filed a report, I said, "My car is drivable. I'll get it fixed whenever I find the time."

Off I went, making my way the best I could to find a place to stay for the night. I was no further than one block down the road when another car went into a slide and ran nose-first into the driver's side of my car. This time, it was much more than just a dent. The impact broke out my window.

At that point, I was determined to find a place to stay, even if I had to sleep in the booth of a restaurant. I stayed there until they re-opened the highways two days later.

While I was in Montreal, I heard that some of the boys were trying to organize a union for the wrestlers. What a thing that would have been. It would have been ideal. I had seen the benefits of having a union when I worked at Stelco. Mad Dog Vachon was instrumental in trying to put it together. He might have been working for Verne Gagne then because we all met in Chicago. Even if the other promoters blackballed us, there might have been enough of us that we could have formed our own promotion. Unfortunately, only a few guys showed up—me, Mad Dog, Butcher Vachon, and Buddy Roberts. I think Rene Goulet was there, as well.

The promoters in Montreal were good people. When I left Montreal, I gave my notice and left on good terms. Johnny Rougeau told me that he expected me to come back in the future. Other than a few shots here and there, I never went back on a full-time basis.

In a sense, I owe my career to getting that break in Montreal. For that, I want to say "thank you" to Jacques Rougeau.

Chapter 9
The Insurance Policy

In 1969, Captain Lou Albano and Tony Altomare came to Montreal from New York as a team called the Sicilians. The Captain came up to me one night and said, "I’m going to put a word in to Bruno Sammartino about you when I get back to New York."

That’s exactly what he did. The story he told me later was that he went home and told Bruno that they should bring me to the New York territory. I don’t think Bruno knew who I was because, years later, he told me that he had never heard of Red McNulty.

At the time, I never considered myself to be someone who was anywhere near the level of working with Bruno. Bruno was a verifiable legend and he had a huge following back then. I didn’t think I was good enough for people in that category to put me over. When I say "put me over," I don’t mean losing a match to me. I mean "putting me over" as in making me look like I was "a competitor capable" of beating a talent like Bruno.

I loved working with Bruno. It was such a thrill for me. At the time, Bruno owned the Pittsburgh territory, so he brought me in for a few weeks to check me out. The Pittsburgh territory was the easiest territory I ever worked. I was only there for a couple of months, but the trips were short, we got good payoffs, and we only had to work three or four nights a week. I was both nervous and excited about having the opportunity to wrestle Bruno in a program [series of matches]. I shouldn’t have worried because, in my opinion, Bruno and I were made to wrestle each other. Bruno liked the fact that I was a shy, introverted type of person because he could talk to me, and I would listen. When we were in the ring, out styles complemented each other. He wasn’t afraid to let me look good because he was the champ and people worshiped the ground he walked on.

When we wrestled in Pittsburgh, Bruno was surprised by how much my work had improved. However, he did give me some much needed advice, telling me that I needed to be the general in the ring. In other words, I should take control by calling spots. I was a bit reserved at first because Bruno had always been my hero, but he helped me break out of my shyness by forcing me to be more into the match.

In a short time, Bruno had talked to the promoters in New York and convinced them to bring me in. When I got there, they put Tony Angelo with me as my manager. I wasn't scared of doing promos, but I still didn't feel comfortable doing them, especially in the role of a Russian. Tony was a good talker, so when the office told me that he would be doing my talking, I didn't resist at all. It worked out well because it added to the mystic of my Russian persona.

While he did the promos, Tony would have me do pushups and squats, which is what Bob Backlund did years later. Of course, I couldn't do as much as Backlund did. He was in tip-top shape.

Once again, I thought Tony was great on promos. His role was that of a loud, overbearing guy, kind of how you think somebody in the Mafia would be. I thought he was great.

Surprisingly enough, in contrast to the loud, brash, manager that he portrayed, Tony Angelo was a nice, quiet man who loved his family. Even though managers in the Northeast didn't travel to house [arena] shows as much as managers in other territories, many of the trips were long and tiring, and Tony didn't enjoy the life on the road. Most of all, he hated to be away from his family. When his doctor told him that he had diabetes, he decided to quit and return to his family in Montreal. One day, he came to me and said, "I've got to go home to my family."

When Tony left, the office told me that my new manager would be Captain Lou Albano. The storyline given to the fans was that Tony Angelo sold my contract to the Captain.

The Captain was really good. When it came to doing interviews, he was quite different from Tony Angelo. I suppose the best way to describe the

Captain is to say that he was a cartoon character. He had a lot of character, did a lot of hollering, and made great facial expressions when he talked. From the beginning, he encouraged me to say as little as possible. Since he did all of the talking, it gave me a mystique and added more depth to my character. The people couldn't figure me out because I was so mysterious and quiet. If I talked too much, they would realize that I was human, just like everybody else. Before every promo, the Captain would say, "Keep your arms folded and keep your chin pointed up. When you do that, you look bigger."

Every three weeks, Vince McMahon Sr. would take us out for dinner and drinks after the TV taping in Pennsylvania. We would meet in a private room so none of the fans would see the babyfaces and heels socializing together. After having a few drinks, Lou Albano would stand up and announce to everyone that Vince was nothing but a no-good, Irish, so-and-so. Bruno would speak up and say, "Sit down and be quiet, Lou. You've had too much to drink."

Bruno and Lou would then get into a verbal war with each other. I believe they were just putting on a show for the boys because Vince Sr. would always laugh it off.

I traveled with the Captain now and then, but I was living in Asbury Park, while the Captain lived up around Connecticut. Usually, I would meet up with several of the heel wrestlers and we would share the travel expense.

During my career, I wrestled both with and without a manager. In my mind, if the promoter felt that I needed to have a manager, then I was fine with that, as long as they didn't cut into my money. I wasn't, however, going to kick anything back to a manager. I had a few managers who asked me to kick some of my money back to them. I would say, "It wasn't my idea to have you as my manager. It was the office's, so they can take care of you."

When I look back on it, who really knows? Maybe the promoters took a cut out of my pay and gave it to them, anyway. Most of the time, the guys didn't compare paychecks, so I wouldn't have known. Once I reached a certain point in my career, though, I always had a guarantee where I wouldn't make less than a certain amount of money. My standard rule was

that if I couldn’t average $1,000 a week in a territory, I wouldn’t go in. Many times, when I did get that guarantee, the promoter would say, "I’ll put you in that spot, but you have to carry the load."

I didn’t have any problem with that. I was more than willing to work hard to uphold my end of the bargain. The other side of that equation was, if the territory drew more money than they expected, they didn’t pay more than $1,000, so I might have come out short on what I could have made.

When I went to New York, though, I didn’t go in on a guarantee. Vince McMahon Sr. and I had a verbal agreement, and I never once thought that he wouldn’t live up to his end of the bargain. I’ll talk more about him later.

In the spring of 1970, Jim Barnett called and asked me to come to Australia for a 10-week tour. The timing was right because I knew that my run in New York was coming to an end. I was still relatively new to the wrestling business, but one thing I learned early in my career. Don’t ever overstay your welcome. When you’ve been in one territory for a lengthy period of time, you run the risk of getting stale. When that happens, the promoters put you in preliminary matches. I didn’t want things to reach that point, so I was ready to make a move. I had a good run against Bruno for about a year and I did well.

In Australia, King Curtis and I rented apartments adjacent to one another. We both had our wives with us. Of course, those were my drinking days. Curtis had a friend who owned a farm where they brewed their own wine. Each morning, we found a bottle of wine on our doorstep, and each night, Curtis and I would get together and drain the bottle.

Australia was a good 20 years behind the United States. They didn’t have refrigerators. They still used ice boxes. I loved it, though, because you had to make a run to the store every day to buy fresh food. We store our food in refrigerators now for days, sometimes weeks. We cooked fresh food every day.

I have so many good memories of the Australia territory. Playboy Gary Hart was my manager while I was there, which was good for me because Gary was also the booker. I had some good times there with Gary. We would visit

Jim Barnett in his penthouse at the Chevron Hotel and have some good conversations.

Gary Hart took me to a show at a place called Le Girls. Gary said, "They have a great show at a place down the road. Let’s go check it out."

When I got there, I realized that Le Girls weren’t girls. They were transvestites and men in drag. It was just entertainment, but I remember thinking, "I need to get out of here before somebody sees me."

I remember wrestling Mark Lewin. There was a microphone hanging over the ring on a cord. After the ring announcer would use it to make an announcement, somebody would pull the mike up out of the way. I was jumping up, trying to grab it to use as a weapon against Mark, but it was just out of my reach. It was obvious to the people that I wanted it. Mark finally helped me by grabbing the cord himself, and then let me take it away and use it. He turned the tables by blocking me and putting it around my neck.

Johnny Barend was a big name in Hawaii. He was a great wrestler, but he would do crazy, off-the-wall things. One day, he ran out during one of my TV matches. He wasn’t supposed to get involved, but he wanted to inject himself into the program. At first, I thought he was a fan. The people were all wondering what he was going to do, too. He was a babyface, so they thought he might attack me. Instead, he ran to the ring, looking like a crazy man, then he turned around and ran right back out. I never did find out why he did that.

I went into Australia on a $1,500 a week guarantee. After I was there for a month, Jim Barnett tried to get me to accept a thousand. That was typical of most promoters. They tried to see what they could get away with. When I said I’d rather go home, he backed down and continued to pay me what he had promised.

Barnett was a real character. Every week, he held a meeting with the boys and asked for their input. He would prance into the room, hop up to sit on a corner of the table, cross his legs, and say, "Okay, my boys. Who has suggestions?"

He would give a rundown of the business, and then he would air his complaints. If nobody had much to say, he would ask everybody, one by one, "Do you have anything to say today?"

Most of the boys would say, "Not today, Jim."

Barnett was a good promoter in the sense that he never bothered you personally, but we always had to suffer through those weekly meetings.

When I left Australia, I went to New Zealand for a couple of shots, and then I worked in Fiji and Hawaii for a couple of months. I really enjoyed Hawaii because the schedule was easy. We only worked three times a week, which gave me plenty of time to workout, lay out on the beach, and allow my body to rest and heal. Hawaii was a great territory. It was almost like paradise. As easy as it was, I still made $300 to $400 a week. They had a big turnover of talent because guys would stop over on their way to Japan, or on their way back home.

By the spring of 1970, Bruno Sammartino had been the WWWF champion for seven years, and he probably needed a rest. Prearranged matches or not, most people don’t realize that the rings in the Northeast were as hard as concrete. Taking bumps every night in those rings takes a toll on a person. Their rings were also 24-foot rings, which are larger than those in other territories. You had to run further when you ran the ropes. They also used four ropes, instead of the standard three.

One day, while I was working out in Sam Steamboat’s gym, Pedro Morales walked in. "I want to talk to you," he said.

After I showered and cleaned up, we left and had a beer in a quiet corner of a local bar. "Vince called me in Los Angeles. He asked me to fly here to talk to you. Bruno needs to take some time off. He wants to rest and spend some time with his family."

"Okay," I said, not quite sure where Pedro was going with the conversation.

Then he dropped the bombshell. "He wants to drop the belt to you."

I would have said something at that point, but I was absolutely speechless.

"Would you be interested in taking the [WWWF] belt from Bruno in the Garden, and then dropping it to me three weeks later?"

It took me a few seconds, but I finally managed to spit out, "Are you kidding?"

Hawaii was paradise, but it paled in comparison to the opportunity being handed to me at that moment. Whenever I look back on the highlights of my career, the match where I took the WWWF title from Bruno had to be the pivotal point of my career. It really set my career on fire. At the time, though, I remember thinking that I couldn’t believe they picked me, of all people!

I called Vince McMahon Sr. to find out exactly what he wanted. He wanted me to return to New York, where he would give me a big push for four months, then have me take the belt from Bruno. Three weeks later, I would lose the belt to Pedro, and then I would stay for another year to work a program with him.

Less than one month before, my wife and I thought my run in New York was over, so we had moved out of New York and back to British Columbia … and now we had to move back! The first thing we did after arriving back in New York was to lease an apartment in Asbury Park.

Four months later, and just a few days before my title match with Bruno, Vince Sr. came up to me and said, "I have to make a few changes. I’d like you to stay for just a couple of months, then leave, and come back in a few years for a program with Pedro."

Pedro needed to have a few months of solid wins to really get over with the fans, so I understood his reasoning, but I wasn’t happy because it made a mess of my plans. "Wait a minute!" I said. "I moved back to New York with the promise of working here for a year or more. I have a lease on an apartment and was secure in the fact that I would be making a certain amount of money over the next year."

"I know you'll suffer financially from the move," he said, "so for the remainder of the time you're here, I'll pay you an additional $1,500 a week on top of your payoffs. You could make $5,000 per week."

That was fair. The additional compensation would more than make up for any losses I might incur. "That's fine, Vince. I'll come back in a few years when you're ready for me."

I always got along well with Vince Sr. He was one of my two favorite promoters, the other being Paul Boesch. Vince was a gentleman. He showed respect for me, and from what I could see, he showed the same respect for the rest of his talent. He was always willing to talk business. If I had a complaint, he always took time to listen and talk to me.

Money was never an issue, either. I had a good deal while I was there. During one two-month period, I made $32,000. As the champion, I got five percent of the gross. If my paycheck didn't seem to be what it should have been, all I had to do was go to the office and say, "I need to talk to you."

Vince would look at his book and I would look at mine. I would say, "I know that we had more than 10,000 people in the arena that night. By my calculations, you owe me an additional $2,000."

We would talk about the discrepancy until, eventually, he would look over his bifocals and say, "You have a point, Ivan. Maybe we rounded off. I'll tell you what. I'll give you an additional $1,300."

There was a lot of jealousy and backstabbing in the business. That was prevalent from the earliest days of professional wrestling and is just as bad today. Wrestlers, who we referred to as stooges and rats, would get into the promoters' ears. If a promoter brought you into his territory because he thought you qualified for a spot, the stooges would go to the promoter behind your back and talk about you. Whenever I went to the office to pick up my paycheck, the same guys always seemed to be there—hanging around, talking, and gossiping.

Other than going to pick up my paycheck, I was never one to go to the office. I could have extended my career, or gotten better bookings, if I had

gone to the office more—not to bad-mouth other guys, but to suggest things that the office could do with me. I didn't feel like that was my place, though. I always left that up to the bookers and promoters. It was my feeling that if they thought I was qualified to fill a certain position, or to participate in an angle, they would let me know.

That approach worked for me because I never had a bad run-in with any of the promoters or bookers that I worked for, and most of them made good use of my talent. George Scott involved me in things in Charlotte. Dusty Rhodes used me well in Florida. Gorilla Monsoon helped me when I was in New York. Dick the Bruiser, Verne Gagne, Eddie Graham, Sam Muchnick, Johnny Rougeau, Jim Barnett—they all treated me well and with respect. Whenever I had a problem with money, or concern about my bookings, they would take the time to listen and do what they could to make it right.

I've never heard anybody say a bad word about Paul Boesch, the promoter in Houston, either. He was always a straightforward gentleman who went out of his way to make friendships with the guys. He paid out good, so that made him a favorite promoter. When he took a vacation trip to Russia, he bought me a leather bag with USSR embroidered on the side. Not only did it cost him a good deal of money, but he had to lug it around with him. I was so upset when I heard that someone from airline customs cut it apart while looking for contraband.

Some guys were really gifted in the office in terms of booking, so when they got the pencil, they were able to control the outcome of their own matches and the way the fans see them. If they drew money, they got credit for being a success as both a booker and a worker. Ole Anderson gets a lot of credit for the success of the Atlanta promotion, but there were times when the houses were bad. When that happened, he was always man enough to take the blame for them. When you're the booker, you have to accept both the credit AND the blame. There's a lot of weight riding on your shoulders.

The title match with Bruno that night was THE highlight of my career. When the bell rang signifying that I was the winner of the match, there was complete silence. When I asked the referee to raise my hand and give me the belt, he said, "No, Ivan. You need to go to the dressing room … NOW!"

The fans knew that I had won the title, but they were so stunned by what had happened that they just stood there. The referee knew that we were within seconds of having a full-scale riot on our hands, so they wanted me to get out of the ring before anything like that happened.

A day or two after winning the WWWF title from Bruno, I wrestled Mario Milano. Mario had left the territory three months earlier, but Vince McMahon Sr. flew him into the territory for this one match.

My match with Milano that night was filmed for television. During the course of the match, Milano caught me in an abdominal stretch. After Milano held me in the stretch for a few seconds, the referee called for the bell. He raised Milano's hand and handed him the title belt. I was dumbfounded because that was not the finish that had been planned, so I shouted at the referee. "What are you doing?"

"I'm sorry," he said, then he took the microphone and said, "I'm sorry, ladies and gentlemen. I thought I heard Mr. Koloff say he submitted. We will continue the match."

I eventually figured out what they had done. They made it seem as if I had submitted, which would have made Milano the new champion ... and it was all captured on video tape. What I couldn't figure out was ... why?

When I got back to the dressing room after the match, I was hot. I went straight to the referee. "What was that all about?" I screamed.

Gorilla Monsoon, who was there to handle the finishes, told me to cool down. "What do you mean cool down?," I shouted. "What kind of a double-cross are you trying to pull here? If you want me to do something, ask! Don't pull a ridiculous stunt like that!"

Gorilla explained that what they did was make it look as if I had conceded the match to Mario when he got me in the abdominal stretch. They then filmed the referee handing the WWWF title belt to Milano. They wanted to make it look like I lost the belt, just in case I gave them a hard time and tried to hold them up for more money, or refused to drop the title to Pedro. If I backed them into a corner, they could just say, "Okay, Ivan. Goodbye!"

At that point, they would air the tape on every one of their television stations and tell the people that Milano had won the title.

"Vince wanted to do this to protect ourselves," Gorilla explained. "We're not going to use the tape. Vince just wanted a guarantee that you would drop the belt when we asked."

The tape was their insurance policy, but they didn't know me enough to realize that they didn't need it. On February 8, 1971, I dropped the WWWF title to Pedro in the Garden, just three weeks after winning the belt from Bruno. I left a few weeks later, but in the years ahead, whenever I came back to New York, I was paid a main event fee, even if I wasn't the main event. Vince Sr. was very fair in that regard. He was a nice promoter to work for. He would take the time to shake your hand, even if you were an underneath guy.

I got along well with Vince McMahon Jr., too. He wasn't the promoter then. He was just the commentator, and he did a great job in that capacity.

It must have been around this time that I was given the nickname, The Russian Bear. I don't think it was the office that came up with the idea. I believe it started in one of the wrestling magazines.

In May 1971, I went on a nine-week tour of Japan. One of the guys there was Bob Sweetan, who was wrestling as Bob Carsen. Just about everybody worked out with weights, which were set up in the dressing room. Bob and I worked out together. In addition, we would get our cardio exercise by running on the roof of the hotel. It was hard to run in the streets because the streets were so congested, especially in the larger cities. We would run lap after lap after lap.

Late one night, we were making more noise than normal. We had a few beers and we were talking loudly and laughing. Freddie Blassie, who lived on the top floor, which was just below where we were running, was trying to sleep. He leaned out the window and yelled, "Would you guys cut out the noise? Some of us are trying to sleep!"

I yelled right back at him, "You’re an old man, Blassie. That’s why you have to go to bed so early. Us young guys have to work out."

The next morning, I apologized to Fred and his wife, Miyako. I had been drinking the night before, and when I woke up that next morning, I felt really bad about being so ignorant. Freddie was a class act and a gentleman of our time.

After making the trip to Japan and making a few shots in Pittsburgh and Vancouver, I decided to take a couple of months off, which turned out to be a good thing. I was worried because I had been hacking and spitting blood at night, so I went to Simon Fraser University in Vancouver for a checkup. They had a machine that x-rayed me in layers. After the doctor did his tests, he came to the conclusion that I had a lung disease called sarcoidosis, which they believed at the time was the beginnings of tuberculosis. That really scared me.

I weighed 290 pounds at the time, so my doctor told me to lose 70 pounds and quit smoking, and for the next ten years, I took prednisone, which is a steroidal medication, and had x-rays taken every six months. It was hard enough to do either one of those two things, but to do them both at the same time was really tough. One of the side-effects of prednisone is that you gain weight. It was only a 5 mg dose, but it made me retain fluid, so I was really struggling to keep my weight down. Of course, I didn’t stop drinking my beer, but I did stop smoking. However, I traded one bad habit for another. I started to chew tobacco.

The results of my six-month checkups were always the same for nine years. Then, one day, my doctor told me that the sarcoidosis was decreasing in size. He said, "Whatever you’re doing, just keep doing it."

I did exactly what he told me for the next six months. When I had my next scheduled checkup, he told me that my lungs were completely cleared up. All they could find was a slight scarring, which was a normal part of the healing process. Healing that quickly was very unusual, so when they asked me what I was doing, I was honest with them. "The only thing I’m doing differently is smoking marijuana."

I had started to smoke marijuana when I was working in Florida, and by that time, I was smoking quite regularly. The doctor didn’t think that had anything to do with it, but I wasn’t too sure. That was all I could think of that could account for the change. More than likely, I was trying to find a reason to justify my smoking. Whatever the reasons, I was very thankful that my problem was gone, and to this day, it has never come back.

Towards the end, the doctor said the sarcoidosis was clearing up. Six months later, all he could find was scar tissue. Six months after that, even the scar tissue was gone. It was unbelievable!

Chapter 10
Blackout

I started wrestling in the Minneapolis territory, which was known as the American Wrestling Alliance, or the AWA, on October 7, 1971, and I stayed there until April 8, 1974. There was a lot of great talent in the territory—Superstar Billy Graham, Wahoo McDaniel, Dick Murdoch, Dusty Rhodes, Billy Robinson, Blackjack Mulligan, Black Jack Lanza, Dick the Bruiser, and the Crusher. The territory was doing good business and everybody was making money.

While I was there, I met Ric Flair for the first time. I was impressed by his talent even back then. Ric was training at the school run by Verne Gagne, the Minneapolis promoter, and was in the graduating class with the Iron Sheik, Jim Brunzell, and Ken Patera, all of whom made a name for themselves in the business.

Ric was always the first to volunteer to try different moves and bumps. Whenever somebody in the class said, "We need somebody to take a backdrop," Flair would be the first one to raise his hand, and at the time, he was a big guy! He weighed a lot more than he did in later years. I was so impressed by all the bumps Flair took. He definitely stood out as the student with the most potential.

On November 20, 1973, I had the opportunity to wrestle Ric in Moline, Illinois. I won the match.

It was probably the only win I ever had against Ric.

When Ric was still in the AWA, we were making the long trip together from Davenport, Iowa, to Minnesota, where we both lived. Ric said he had a birthday coming up, so we stopped and bought some wine—and drank from it all the way back to Minnesota. The next day, I had a headache that stayed with me all day long. We had a lot of fun, though.

In my opinion, Ric is, and always has been, a class act. In my book, he is A-Number One.

When George Scott, the booker in Charlotte, asked me for my impression of him, I said, "He stands out in front of all the other students and he has a lot of potential."

George had scouted Flair personally, but I'd like to think that I helped get Flair into the Carolinas, which is where his career really took off.

When I wrestled Verne Gagne in 1972, he slapped me on the ear so hard that he hurt my ear drum. My head was ringing. I was mad! I started to fight back and legitimately hit him as hard as I could.

A few minutes later, he did the same thing to my other ear. That one turned out to be a worse injury than the first because he actually ruptured the ear drum. For a while, the doctors thought they would have to do some skin grafting to fix it, but over time, the perforation healed on its own.

I have to give some credit to Verne because he was trying to show me that my actions needed to be believable. I thought I was doing a good job of executing my kicks and punches, but Verne was from the old school and he wanted me to lay them in. He wanted me to be aggressive, which would make my matches more credible to the public. When I wrestled against guys like Verne, Mad Dog Vachon, Hans Schmidt, and Eddie Graham, they were credible to me. Half of the time, I was fighting for my life. That helped me a lot in the future because that was what drew money.

Johnny Valentine and Hans Schmidt both wrestled the same way. They wouldn't think anything about knocking the wind out of you. I respect those guys, though. I worked a stiff style, but I wasn't as stiff as they were. As I got older, I would occasionally give a young wrestler a good, stiff whack on their back. They would look at me like, "What's wrong with you?"

On the other hand, during my career, I wrestled good, solid, technical wrestlers like Danny Hodge, Edouard Carpentier, Mil Mascaras, Ronnie Garvin, and Billy Robinson. They were all in great shape and were very proud of their skills. If they were going to work and sell for you, they made

you dig deep and earn what they gave you. I was never a good technical wrestler, as far as knowing a lot of holds or having a lot of expertise. I learned the little that I did know by wrestling people like them. I picked up tips here and there and tried to remember what I had learned.

I was married to Robinson for the better part of 1972. Married means we were together more than we were with our wives because we wrestled each other night after night. I learned a lot from Robinson and he kept me in good shape. He made me work for everything he gave me in every match, but that intensity made it a better match because the people could see it. I honestly believe that the people wondered why we were wrestling so hard. I could almost hear them thinking, "Is this for real?"

Robinson and I would do the spot where we faced each other and clasped our fingers together, trying to force each other to our knees. Most of the time, that spot wasn't a work. We were in a legitimate battle, with both of us trying to force the other down through sheer power.

One time in Denver, I climbed down out of the ring after a 45-minute match with Robinson. It was a hot, sweltering summer, and I was really tired. As I started to walk to the dressing room, a fan jumped onto my back. I flung him off and was getting ready to kick him when his young son jumped in and said, "You leave my Dad alone!"

I said, "Get that stupid American away from me!"

I wasn't happy about it at the time, but I can't blame the fan for getting caught up in the heat of the match. Billy and I did everything we could to push the fans to do exactly what that man did.

There were a lot of great personalities in Minneapolis. Sailor Art Thomas was an unbelievably strong, muscular, black man. He kept 200 pounds of weights in the trunk of his car. When he was on the road, he would pull off the road in a secluded spot, where he would do squats and curls with the entire 200 pounds. Sailor Art had one of the most muscular bodies that I have ever seen, which is amazing because he was steroid free. He had natural muscle mass that nobody else could match. On top of that, he was a sweetheart of a man. He was a gentleman and soft-spoken.

Verne put Stan Kowalski—Big K—with me as my manager. I liked having a manager, especially one like Big K. He was a great talker, and by having him do his thing on the outside of the ring, it gave me more things to do inside the ring. Big K was also a good hand in the ring. We wrestled as tag team partners on many occasions.

Bobby Heenan's reputation was as a great manager, but he was also a great worker. Verne booked me in Moline, Illinois, against Bobby in a Heel vs Heel match. I had a lot of heat with the fans, but Bobby got more heat than me. I came out to the ring first. When he came down to ringside, he would start to climb up onto the ring, but then he would jump right back down. He repeated that until the people were literally in a frenzy, screaming, "You yellow-bellied coward!"

When Bobby finally got into the ring, and the match started, he repeated it all over again. Just before we locked up, he scooted back out of the ring.

That match was a great lesson in psychology for me. I had always been a heel, but on that night, I learned a lot about "being" a heel from Bobby Heenan.

I'll never forget one night in Chicago, when Bobby was managing Blackjack Mulligan and Black Jack Lanza. A fan hit him on the back of the head with a ball peen hammer. It actually put a hole in his head. Needless to say, they took him to the hospital.

I wrestled Red Bastien in Duluth, Minnesota. When I caught him in a bear hug, he acted as if he was trying to break out of it, but what he did was put his feet on top of my feet. When you hold somebody in a bear hug, and they stand on your feet, you can't move. You can't walk. You lose your balance. It was like my feet were glued to the mat. I was struggling just to keep myself from falling down. In the meantime, Red pretended to struggle like mad to get out of my bear hug, but the whole time, he was laughing under his breath at the rib he was playing on me.

The AWA is also where I first met Roddy Piper. He was very young and a lot smaller than he is today. I was very impressed with him because of the

intensity and potential he had to be a star in wrestling. He demanded the respect of other wrestlers because he was, and still is, a very tough guy.

Bull Bullinski, who was wrestling as Bad Boy Shields in 1963 when I first met him in Vancouver, was also in Minneapolis. He did an incredible move that would leave you shaking your head in amazement. He was short and stocky. When you gave him a backdrop, he would land clear across the ring. He would catch his legs inside the second rope, and then fall backwards with his head hitting the mat. I never saw anybody else do that move. Every time he did it, I thought he had broken his neck. I don't know if it really hurt, but he did a great job of selling it, and every time he did it, it never failed to impress me.

On April 18, 1973, Mad Dog Vachon and I went to Japan and won the IWE/IWA tag team title from Great Kusatsu and Strong Kobayashi. That was such a thrill for me because Mad Dog was one of my heroes. I really admired him. Every day, he would put on his big boots and go running. He was an animal.

On one of our days off, it was raining very hard, so we decided to have a few drinks at the hotel bar. Like the bars in most hotels, the drinks were expensive, so I said, "Let's go down the street and buy a bottle." The bars allowed people to bring their own drinks.

We bought the tallest bottle of whiskey that I had ever seen in my life. The last thing I remember was unscrewing the cap off of the bottle. The next day, Mad Dog told me the whole story of what I said and did.

When I was good and wasted, I said, "I arm-wrestled my brothers and beat them all. I want to arm-wrestle you guys."

I decided to start with my friend, Buck Ramstead. When Buck put me down, I demanded a rematch. Once again, he forced my hand to the table. I got irate and said, "If you do that again, I'm gonna punch you in the nose."

He put me down again ... so I punched him in the nose. That's when the fighting started. I even got into it with Lars Anderson when he grabbed me. His only intent was to stop me from fighting, but I took it as a sign that he

wanted to join in on the festivities. The next morning, when I woke up and looked into the mirror, I saw a stranger standing there with a torn shirt and blood all over his face. Like an idiot, I assumed that I got drunk and fell down.

When I woke up in the mornings, my normal routine was to do 45 minutes of pushups, leg raises, and squats in my room. That morning was no exception. When I finished my routine, I opened the door to my room, only to see Buck walking out of his room, which was across the hall from mine. "Hi, Buck!" I said.

"You jerk!"

"What's the matter with you?"

"You don't remember what happened last night?"

He walked off in a huff. I didn't learn what happened until I talked to Mad Dog later in the day. "When you're sober," he said, "you're the nicest guy in the world, but when you're drunk, you go crazy! Last night, you were like a wild man. You wanted to fight everybody in the bar."

I didn't remember anything about the fight because I blacked out before it even started. Of course, I should have heeded the warning signs. Blacking out is the first stage of alcoholism. The result of our fracas was that we had to pay $300 for the damage we caused to the hotel. I wasn't the only person who got charged. Every one of the boys on the tour had to pay $300. There is no way that the damage came to $2,400, but that's what they charged us. Of course, the boys were all mad at me after that and gave me the cold shoulder for the rest of the tour.

At the time, I was upset with Lars because he went for my eye during the fight. Later that next day, I approached Lars and said, "I understand you wanted to fight me last night? I was drunk then, but I'm not drunk now. Why don't we fight now?"

That's a good example of what alcohol can do to a person. Here I was, standing on the side of the street, and I was picking a fight with Lars

Anderson. Lars is a tough guy. He’s not the kind of guy you want to mess around with. Fortunately for me, Lars had much more control over his emotions than I did over mine. "Ivan! I was trying to stop you from fighting! You went nuts!"

After discussing the situation for a few minutes, we shook hands and never mentioned it again.

My drinking problem began when I was very young. Our family would have a party twice a year and drinking beer was allowed. To me, even as a young boy, it was socially acceptable, especially if you worked hard. It was the adults’ way of rewarding us. By 1973, when I was in Japan, I was drinking regularly, as in every day.

My problem got so bad that even my best friends would say, "Straight and sober, Ivan’s the nicest guy, but look out when he drinks! He turns into a demon!"

In all, I made twelve trips to Japan and wrestled for both promotions—Giant Baba’s All Japan Pro Wrestling and Antonio Inoki’s New Japan Pro Wrestling. Baba and Inoki were both very nice and they honored every deal they made with me. I respected the Japanese wrestlers for being in great shape. They were hard workers. I also respected the fans. They were very polite. They did a lot of bowing and clapped if they liked something you did in the ring. They even clapped if you were a heel and you beat someone up.

We spent five weeks in Japan and returned to Minneapolis during the last week of May 1973.

Superstar Billy Graham was a true asset to the business. He must have weighed 290 pounds but he was in great shape. He did a spot in his matches when his opponent would make a comeback. When his opponent came after him, Billy would hang like a monkey from the top rope, as if he was trying to get away. The people would go crazy.

Superstar and I worked out together. I never had a trainer, so Billy taught me a lot about weightlifting. I learned a lot just by watching him.

Everybody knows that Ric Flair was into partying. If he wasn’t partying, he was thinking about it. Billy was the exact opposite. He wasn’t a party guy, but he was a great tag team partner and a nice guy. Our styles in the ring seemed to complement each other. We teamed together in Minnesota, Florida, and New York. The fact that an American and a Russian were teaming up made the fans hate us that much more. The greatest benefit I got from teaming with Billy was that he covered up for me on interviews. He was a great talker. There were a lot of great talkers on the mike, but Billy was one of them who really excelled at it.

One day, right in the middle of an interview, Billy said, "I have a gift for the Bear today. We’re gonna make him cool."

He handed me a pair of sunglasses.

The guys who were great on the mike were the guys who projected stories and characters to which the fans were able to relate. Dusty Rhodes was a great interview. He had his own rap. He didn’t portray himself as somebody born with special privileges. He told the people that he came from the wrong side of the tracks. Not only that, but he was proud to come from that side of the tracks. And yet, he overcame every obstacle that was thrown at him and he fought his way to the top. The fans could relate to that.

Blackjack Mulligan and Mad Dog Vachon had stories that the fans understood. The people believed in Bruno Sammartino and Pedro Morales as ethnic characters, normal people who were just trying to make their way in this country. Gene and Ole Anderson projected the persona of mean, cruel guys who enjoyed breaking the bones of their opponents. Wrestling fans went to the arenas with the hope of seeing somebody slap the arrogance from their faces. When I was a kid, John and Chris Tolos used to get under my skin. John would say, "Isn’t that right, Brother Chris?"

Chris would reply, "That’s right, Brother John."

They were arrogant—two brothers looking out for each other.

The best promo man of all time is the guy who drew the most money—Hulk Hogan. He came into the business at a time when Vince McMahon Jr.

was trying to change the way professional wrestling was presented to the public. Hogan looked the part of the modern wrestler and he had the gift of gab. For the most part, one Hulk Hogan interview was the same as every other Hulk Hogan interview, but he projected his persona into the hearts of the viewers and pulled them to the box office. It wasn’t so much what he said. It’s how he said it.

One of the best promos I was ever involved in took place in the West Indies. We were doing interviews in the TV studio with Kevin and Kerry von Erich. I went out to do my interview. As we went on the air, the telephone rang. The announcer picked up the receiver, listened for a second, and handed it to me, saying, "A fan wants to talk to you, Mr. Koloff."

It took me completely by surprise. I had never taken a call from a wrestling fan. The caller said, "You don’t have a chance tonight. If I were going to wager money, I would bet on the Von Erichs."

I had heard the voice before, but I couldn’t place it, so I went into character and said, "Well, get ready to lose your money, and if you’re man enough, come down to the arena and see for yourself."

The caller said, "I will … because I’m your opponent—Kevin von Erich."

And he hung up.

That was a great interview, and completely spontaneous. It was so simple and to the point. When Kevin and Kerry came back into the studio, we all laughed about it. The Von Erich boys were great talents and nice guys.

One night in 1973, Superstar and I were wrestling Wahoo McDaniel and Billy Robinson. After taking a backdrop, I landed on an overlapped board that was under the mat, and I ruptured a disc in my back. The doctors wanted me to undergo back surgery, but I was scared to go under the knife. I was afraid they wouldn’t do a good job, which could possibly put an end to my career. Superstar suggested that I take steroids to help with the recovery.

I was already taking prednisone, which had been prescribed to me by my doctor in 1972 when I had contracted pneumonia after being diagnosed with tuberculosis. After I ruptured the disc in my back, I took five milligrams of Dianabol daily for two weeks. I immediately felt stronger and was able to lift heavier weights than I ever had before.

I also blew up like a balloon. I gained twenty pounds. That was quite an increase in weight, especially since the normal weight gain for people on Dianabol is two to four pounds per week. I was still on prednisone and I was supposed to be losing weight, so I got scared and refused to take the Dianabol again after the second week. Once I went off prednisone, I started running and I lost weight. I felt good.

When I was around Billy, it took a lot of willpower for me to not use the steroids because he was injecting every day. It was tempting to use them because he always looked so cut up. Who wouldn't want to look like Superstar Billy Graham? I did, but I also knew what the steroids could do to my health.

From the time I was 18 years old, until I started taking prednisone, I always concentrated on gaining weight. My method was to drink a gallon of milk each day and a protein shake after every meal. I also watched what I ate. I watched it on my fork as I brought it to my mouth. I ate everything I could. I suppose you could say I force-fed myself.

When you're on the road, it's hard to keep a workout schedule, but it's even tougher to eat correctly. It takes a lot of discipline. Superstar maintained a rigid diet and really concentrated on eating correctly. He didn't drink alcohol, or even soft drinks. He drank a lot of juices and protein drinks. He would consume an excessive amount of protein—raw eggs, tuna fish, and meat. He would go to restaurants and ask for six egg whites. Kiwi was one of the staples he ate a lot of. He wanted to put good, healthy food into his body to counter the effects of the steroids. I knew that he had to be suffering side effects because he was taking much more than the five milligrams that I had taken.

I also worked out with weights four times a week. I did a split routine with a lot of heavy sets, pushing as much weight as I could. I was never really

strong, but I could squat 500 pounds and bench press 435. That was enough for me. I wasn't trying to win contests. I just wanted to look as good as I possibly could and stay strong. Of course, looking good and staying strong doesn't necessarily equate to being in good cardiovascular shape. I wasn't in cardiovascular shape until 1968, when I started to run in Montreal, but it wasn't until 1983, when I was in Charlotte, that I included running on a steady basis in my training routine.

In my opinion, a lot of the good, talented guys who died at a young age—Mike Hegstrand, Rick McGraw, Rick Rude, and Curt Hennig—died because of their abuse of steroids. They took steroids at the same time they were doing other drugs, not to mention the alcohol they consumed. The combination of the steroids, drugs, and alcohol put a strain on their heart. A lot of former athletes have enlarged hearts from their years of steroid abuse. They all wanted to get bigger and stronger. Of course, that's what the business called for—24-inch arms and massive muscles. Those were the people who were getting the big contracts.

You could get just about any other kind of drug, as well. Drugs were always available in the dressing room. Not a little. A lot! The doctor would bring boxes of drugs into the dressing room. All you had to do was place your order. Just name the drug and you could get it.

Most of the boys took drugs because they were in constant pain from the injuries they suffered. The nightly matches didn't allow the body time to heal, and it was hard to get proper rest due to the long trips. When you woke up in the morning, you took speed [methamphetamine], like black beauties or Yellow Jackets. If you had a sore muscle, Valium would help you relax. If you were in pain, you could take Seconal [secobarbital] or Quaaludes [methaqualone].

Of course, with drugs being so readily available, it was easy for the guys to abuse them, or become addicted to them. Looking back on it all, I realize now that many of the drugs we thought we were taking to cure our ailments had become recreational drugs. We used them to party. That was unfortunate because many of the boys became addicted to them.

Of course, my drug of choice [a bad choice] was alcohol. One night, Verne Gagne gave me a cash payoff of $800. I got pretty well lit before going back to my motel room. Because of experiences in my youth, I always felt like I had to hide my valuables. I was always afraid that somebody would come into my room when I was passed out and take them, so I hid everything of value. That night, I hid my money. When I woke up the next morning, I couldn't remember where I hid it. I panicked! I tore the mattress apart and pulled the pictures off of the walls. I eventually found the money behind the headboard of the bed. The headboard was attached to the wall, but it was loose on one side, so I had pulled it away from the wall and crammed the envelope of money behind it. That happened to me several times.

At the beginning of 1974, I was in so much pain from the back injury that I had to take a couple of months off to recuperate. During that time, several of my friends—Ray Stevens, Billy Robinson, Wahoo McDaniel, Superstar Billy Graham, and several others—gave me money to get me through.

When I felt I was well enough to return to work, I thought it might be a good idea to move on. The money in the AWA was good, but I had been there for two years and five months and I didn't want to wear out my welcome. Before I broke the news to Verne, I talked to George Scott, who was booking the Charlotte territory.

In early 1974, George came to Minneapolis on a scouting trip. George must have had Verne's blessing because he took a lot of Verne's guys from Minnesota to Charlotte. I was ready to make a move, so when he asked me if I wanted to go, I jumped at the chance. What I didn't know was that Verne had talked to Dick the Bruiser and made arrangements for me to work for Bruiser in the Indianapolis territory.

When I told Verne about my plans, he was upset because he wanted me to work a program with Dick the Bruiser before I left. Fortunately, he understood my situation and graciously wished me well. I left the territory on good terms with Verne and I have nothing but good things to say about him as a boss and as a promoter.

After I talked to Verne, I called George and we set a starting date. It was premature because I was still having a lot of pain in my back, but I got through it with the help of sleeping pills, muscle relaxers, and pain pills. For a while, I was getting the drugs through prescriptions from my doctor, but as the months went by, and I was unable to get refills, I bought them on the street. When I look back at the drugs we took, combined with the prodigious amounts of marijuana that we were smoking, it's a wonder that I'm still alive.

I also used inversion boots to get relief from my back pain. The boots had hooks on the back that would allow you to hang upside down from a bar. Hanging upside down allows your body weight to traction your spine, decompressing your joints and discs. I used to go to the park and use them to hang upside down on the monkey bars. Ric Flair had an inversion table that worked on the same principle.

Shortly after arriving in Charlotte, I was set up in an arm-wrestling program with Paul Jones. We worked things to where he had my arm almost down to the table, as if he was beating me, at which time I sucker-punched him with my free hand. I was supposed to pick up the table and slam it over his head. The table looked like it weighed 80 pounds, which isn't that heavy, but it was a solidly-built table. I didn't have any problem picking up the table, but it was hard to control due to its size and weight, so I simply pushed it at him and he walked into it. It looked good, though.

The second memorable angle, which took place during my second run in the territory, was a very simple angle involving Wahoo's feathered headdress. When you were involved in an angle with Wahoo, you knew that you were going to make money because the house was almost always good.

The story was that the chief of Wahoo's tribe had donated the feathers. He left the feathers at ringside, so when I went out to do my promo, I tore up the feathers. Wahoo came out later and was practically crying about his loss. He was going to get revenge for both himself and his people. It was a great angle.

Don Jardine, who was wrestling under the mask as the Super Destroyer, was involved in that angle with me. I was very impressed with Jardine. He

later had a chain match with Wahoo. After the match, he said, "This would be a good idea for you to use as a regular gimmick." He handed the chain to me and I used the idea for many years.

In the days before Johnny Valentine was in the plane crash that ended his wrestling career, Don Jardine thought he was being aced out of a program with Valentine and Wahoo McDaniel. At the time, they were the top three guys in the territory. When Jardine approached Wahoo in the dressing room at the Raleigh TV tapings, they lit into each other. I don't know why I got involved, but I offered to be the referee—and I didn't know anything about officiating! I was used to breaking the rules, not enforcing them. I suppose it was because I hated to see two of my friends fighting. This time, however, they were fighting for real.

Words were exchanged and Jardine threw the first punch. They didn't confine their battle to just punching, though. Within seconds, they were kicking and scratching, with Wahoo finally taking Jardine down to the floor. When Jardine clamped a hold on Wahoo's groin, I kicked his hand away. When Wahoo went for Jardine's eyes, I stopped that. "Let's have a clean fight here!"

The advantage between Jardine and Wahoo went back and forth. They stopped fighting once or twice, and then went back at each other again. When it was over, they were both bloody and there was no winner. They were true professionals, though. George Scott came in and said, "You guys have to straighten out your differences because you have to go out and wrestle each other."

When it was their time to wrestle, Wahoo and Jardine went out and continued their angle in the ring. They were both businessmen who knew when it was time to settle down and take care of business.

Wahoo was wonderful. He was a great man, a great wrestler, and an all-around athlete. He was from the old school and wasn't afraid to make his matches look believable. If he hit you with one of his back-handed chops, you had better sell it. If you didn't, you would sell the next chop because it would land on the bridge of your nose.

It was in Charlotte during this time that Ric Flair encouraged me to run with him. While talking one day, we came to the conclusion that we both needed to drop some weight and get in better cardiovascular shape. At the time, we both weighed about 300 pounds. He only lived a short distance from me, so we agreed to meet at his house, since he had a weight lifting set, and we started running around the block.

Ric had played football, so I realized that he must have been used to running, especially during those first few days when I would lag behind. Ric would run ahead of me, so that made me even more determined to pick up the pace and not slow down. Thanks to Ric's encouragement, I ran three miles every day for several years, and I stayed with it until I suffered a cartilage injury.

Ric was a great inspiration to me. He was always a go-getter, in addition to being driven and ambitious. It's easy to see how he became a 19-time world champion in our sport.

I remember volunteering to drive Mr. Fuji's rental car in Greensboro during a snowstorm because he wasn't used to driving in the snow. Since I was from Canada, I volunteered, only to lose control myself. We spun around in a circle before thudding to a sudden stop in a ditch. I'll never forget the look of the passengers—four Japanese wrestlers—when I looked into the rear-view mirror. Fuji and Tenryu's eyes were as wide as saucers. I drove down the ditch for a short distance until I found a place to pull back out onto the road. Fuji said, "I'm glad you're driving because I could never do that!"

"I didn't do it on purpose, Fuji," I said. "It was an accident."

When you were around Johnny Valentine, you always had to keep an eye on your wrestling bag because he took every opportunity to play a trick on you.

On one of my weekly trips to WRAL-TV in Raleigh, North Carolina, I drove my car and had a couple of wrestlers with me. As I was getting dressed after my match, I noticed that my wrestling bag smelled horrible. It was obvious that somebody had put a "stink bomb" in it. I really couldn't point a finger at the guilty party because I had no proof, but I felt certain

that Johnny Valentine was the guilty party. Johnny, who was always a big ribber, was sitting on his chair with a smile on his face.

On the way home, we stopped at our usual beer stop. As I walked into the store, I saw a box of potatoes for sale. A light bulb instantly lit up in my mind. I bought a 6-pack of beer, a sandwich … and one potato.

When a wrestler hits his opponent too hard, it's called a "potato," whether it was accidental or in return for a potato received earlier. I thought I'd give Johnny a real potato. He was riding with somebody else that day, so I planned to beat him back to our meeting place in Charlotte and stuff the potato in his car's tailpipe. The next day, we heard that Johnny couldn't start his car. The muffler had blown up!

So I got revenge by giving Johnny Valentine a potato. There were never any bad feelings between us, though. We were always friends.

I remember getting the news about Johnny's plane crash [October 10, 1975]. Ric Flair, who had followed me into the territory, was being primed to be a main-event talent. The Crocketts were really concerned because not only was their main guy—Johnny Valentine—injured, but Ric and Bob Bruggers were, too. Both of them were involved in programs. With Johnny and Ric unable to wrestle, they brought in Superstar Billy Graham and Angelo Mosca. When Ric returned at the end of January 1976, they gave him a big push and he was off to the races. George Scott even brought in Buddy Rogers to travel with and mentor Ric. They paid Buddy well to give Ric input on the Nature Boy gimmick.

In 1977, nearly two years after the plane crash that Johnny was in, Eddie Graham hired him as booker for the Florida territory. After the show in Tampa one night, Johnny Valentine, Buddy Roberts, Gordon Solie, and I went to a bar. During the evening, a slapping contest became the topic of the conversation. Johnny Valentine, sitting in his wheelchair, and Gordon Solie, across from the table from him, started taking turns slapping each other in order to see who could knock the other out of their chair. I could not believe that Gordon, being a small man, could take the slaps, as well as give the slaps as hard as they were hitting.

Later that evening, Buddy and I drove Johnny home. We all were pretty lit and it was very cold outside. With the help of his crutches, Johnny got out of the car and started walking to his house, but fell in the yard when he was less than halfway there. When Buddy and I tried to help him get up, he pushed us away, insisting that he could get up by himself. When we told Johnny that we were going to wake up his wife and tell her, he got really mad and told us, "Get the hell out of here!"

So, we left. The next day, we went to his house to play chess with him. When his wife answered the door, she reprimanded us for leaving Johnny outside in the yard in the cold. We tried to explain that he insisted we leave, but I’m not sure if she bought our story.

Johnny died on April 24, 2001. God rest his soul.

Chapter 11
Blackballed

On February 8, 1975, I got a call from Pedro Martinez. Pedro had been a wrestling promoter for many years, primarily in the Buffalo territory, but he had also been a partner with Toots Mondt in New York City. Pedro wanted to talk to me about going to work for a new wrestling organization. "I'm going to be starting a new promotion with a guy named Eddie Einhorn. He has a lot of money and wants to get into the business. We're going to start promoting in the Northeast, but we'll eventually go nationwide."

I always looked at wrestling as a free enterprise. Although I always knew that Vince McMahon Sr. ran the Northeast territory, I never thought he should have a monopoly. In fact, I never thought that any promoter should be able to monopolize any area. When Pedro called and offered me $1,500 a week, trans—twice what I was making in Charlotte—and a six-month contract with the option of renewing, it didn't take me long to make my decision.

The name of the organization was the International Wrestling Association [IWA]. They had some great talent signed—Mil Mascaras, Rip Hawk, Nelson Royal, the Love Brothers, the Mongols, Johnny Powers, Mighty Igor, Thunderbolt Patterson, and Tex McKenzie. They also had plans to promote all over the country. I was so convinced that they would make it that I told George Scott about my plans that very night in Greensboro, North Carolina. When I got George on the side, I told him, "I've been contacted by another organization and I'll be leaving in a couple of weeks."

He was upset. "What about the belt?"

At the time, I was the Mid-Atlantic TV champion. I was scheduled to defend the title against Paul Jones later that evening, so I said, "I'll drop it to Paul Jones tonight if you want."

Less than two weeks later, I was working for the IWA.

The owner of the IWA, Eddie Einhorn, was a millionaire. His background, however, wasn't in wrestling. It was in baseball and television syndication. He was a part-owner of the Chicago White Sox and created Chicago Sportsvision, a predecessor to ESPN. In 1958, Einhorn produced the first nationally syndicated radio broadcast of the NCAA Tournament. Ten years later, his TVS network aired the first prime-time telecast of college basketball. He was very successful.

His wrestling operation, however, didn't fare so well. We had a good crew and things went well for a while. After five months went by, I noticed that things weren't going as well as had been expected. Einhorn wasn't making any money, and he couldn't continue to fund it forever.

When Pedro's son, Ron, approached me about renegotiating my contract, he asked me if I would take less money. I think they were testing me. I said, "No, I want what we agreed to. It you can't live up to what we agreed to, then I'll just leave."

We had a big, outdoor show at Roosevelt Stadium in Jersey City, New Jersey on July 10, 1975. It was an important event and I was in the main event. I needed to protect my own interest, so when I walked into the dressing room, I asked, "I need to know now if you're going to renew my contract."

They were very nervous and tried to sweet talk me, but I didn't want to hear anything but the bottom line. I said, "If I don't get an answer now, I'm going to walk out. I've been given the word that Vince will bring me in whenever I'm ready to go."

Nobody would give me an answer.

Earlier that day, a message had been passed to me. "If you don't show up for the main event tonight, you can start working for Vince immediately."

Even though the IWA wasn't really hurting Vince or the other promoters, they were worried that the IWA might take some of their towns. Vince

thought that if I left before the main event, it would anger the IWA fans and convince them to avoid attending future shows.

When the time came to walk out, I stopped to look around the dressing room. If I left, and the organization fell apart because the main event walked out before an important show, then I would be the cause of the boys losing their jobs, and I knew that many of them depended on the IWA to put food on their families table. I thought, "I can’t do this. It’s not right. These guys are all looking for a check, too."

That night, Mil Mascaras and I wrestled three falls in the pouring rain.

When I got home that night, I called my contact in New York and told him that I couldn’t jeopardize the boys’ security. It was a tempting offer, but I had to turn it down because I cared about my friends.

The next day, I discovered exactly how appreciative the IWA was of my loyalty. I received a telegram from Eddie Einhorn saying they were letting me go.

One of the positive things that came out of the IWA was that I had the opportunity to wrestle Lou Thesz, former NWA World heavyweight champion, in Richmond, Virginia. That was the only time in my career that I had the privilege of wrestling Lou. He was close to 60 years old at the time, but he was still doing dropkicks and flying head scissors. I was in awe at how good of a wrestler he was. He was so smooth—what we call a mechanic—and agile. I was very impressed and honored to have had the opportunity.

Einhorn drew some good houses, but they were few and far between, and they didn’t bring in enough revenue to keep the ship afloat. By the fall of 1975, after losing an estimated $500,000, Einhorn and Pedro Martinez pulled out. Johnny Powers kept the company going by promoting in North Carolina, but he, too, closed up shop after a short time.

Like myself and the other guys, Rip Hawk had seen an opportunity with the IWA, but when they started to renegotiate the contracts, everybody began looking for other places to work. Rip decided that he was going to run a few

shows around Charlotte on his own, so he included me because he needed someone with name recognition. I didn't make a lot of money working for Rip, but we did pretty well for several months.

I also worked for Nick Gulas for a couple of weeks. Archie Gouldie [The Mongolian Stomper] was there and we tagged up a few times. We only worked the TVs and a few shots each week.

One day, I got a phone call from Billy Graham, who was living in Phoenix, Arizona. Billy wanted to get a license to promote in California, so the two of us met in Los Angeles. Our plan was to use the Lucha [Mexican] wrestlers, along with some of the talent from that area who were no longer working for the NWA. We found somebody to build a ring and somebody else to make a title belt.

We were naive to think that we could buck the system and get a promoter's license. After all, our country is supposed to be built on free enterprise, but that only applied if you had political contacts. Aileen Eaton, the NWA promoter in Los Angeles, and Vince McMahon Sr., were close friends. Vince's TV aired in Los Angeles, so together, they had enough political clout to block anyone else from coming in to promote. In short, Mrs. Eaton had a monopoly. In addition to that, the athletic commission had all kinds of restrictions that made it all but impossible to start a new company. One of their rules was that you could not promote wrestling and wrestle at the same time. No doubt, that rule had been created to protect Mrs. Eaton from opposition.

After a few months, Vince contacted Billy. The next thing I knew, Billy was back in New York. I couldn't blame him for going. We never were successful at getting a license, and we were always trying to get bookings in other places. I was working on and off for Dick the Bruiser in Indianapolis.

I lived in California for ten months and I spent a lot of time on Santa Monica Beach while I was there, running and working on my tan. When I wasn't wrestling, I ran three miles a day to stay in shape. I saw Arnold Schwarzenegger and Lou Ferrigno training on the beach. I met Dave Draper and went to his home. Dave was into drinking wine. He said it was good for the heart and helped him get that cut-up look.

After leaving California, I made three more trips to Japan. Bruno went to bat for me, as he did so often in my career, and got me the first tour on short notice.

Bruno was always good to me. If I ever called him and told him that I needed work, he would get on the phone with Baba and arrange a tour of Japan. That's a good friend. I'm not the only person he did that for. A lot of people think highly of Bruno. To have a person with that character speaking up for you makes a big difference in your career.

I also enjoyed every one of our matches. He never complained about anything. One night, I came down on Bruno from the top rope. I didn't know it until the next day, but he went to the hospital with torn stomach muscles. He never said a word about it.

When I returned to the United States from Japan, I started to call promoters, in the hopes of finding a place to go. The people I talked to were polite, but I kept hearing things like, "We're full right now," or "Maybe in six months." The promoters had never talked to me like that before. I finally realized that I had been blackballed in the U.S. Nobody would use me.

Once again, thanks to Bruno, Vince McMahon Sr. let me come back to work. He put a word in for me and gave me advice on how to make it right with Vince. I often wondered why Vince took me back, even at the request of Bruno, but Vince always treated me well, even after my time with the IWA. Superstar Billy Graham and other friends also put in a good word for me. Billy suggested to Vince that he bring me back in to work against him. Vince didn't want to do it because he didn't want Superstar there as a babyface.

At the end of 1976, I called Dick the Bruiser, who was promoting the Indianapolis territory. Bruiser was always somewhat of a rebel himself, so I felt sure that I could get booked with him. Bruiser said, "To blazes with them. They're all in each others pockets. They don't tell me what I can and cannot do. I'd love to have you here in Indianapolis."

I started working for Bruiser in January 1977. Bruiser had a small territory and promoted small towns, but I did well during the three months that I was

there. I didn’t go in under a guarantee, but he took care of me. He made sure that I was booked on the Chicago show, as well as Indianapolis, so I got payoffs for two big shows.

I left my car at home and flew into the territory. Shortly after I arrived, I bought an old junker for $150. It was so embarrassing to be seen in that car. I didn’t realize it when I bought it, but it smoked like a factory chimney. Jimmy Valiant always enjoys telling the story about me leaving the territory. I drove the car to the airport and parked it in long-term parking … and I never returned to claim it.

I loved working with Bruiser. I had admired him when I was a youngster, and now I was getting an opportunity to work with him. What a tough guy he was!

One of the most embarrassing moments of my life happened in Indianapolis during a cage match with Bruiser. I don’t know what I was thinking [or perhaps I wasn’t], but we planned a spot in the match where I would jump off the top of the cage onto Bruiser, but he would roll away at the last second. I had jumped from the top of the turnbuckles many times, but that was to be my first attempt at jumping from the top of a cage, which was six feet higher than the top turnbuckles. The cage was shaking when I got up there. I remember thinking, "Man, this is scary!"

I took a beautiful leap into the air, but my landing wasn’t very graceful. When Bruiser moved, I landed flat on my stomach and every bit of wind was knocked out of me.

Jimmy Valiant also had a bad experience when he jumped from a ladder. We were demonstrating the strength of my stomach. Bruiser used the claw hold, so I said, "He can’t hurt me because my stomach is too strong."

The first week, Jimmy jumped off the second rope onto my stomach. Each week, we increased the height. The next week, he jumped from the top turnbuckle. He climbed to the top of the ladder, ten feet up from the mat, and leaped out into midair. He landed with both feet on my stomach—and sprained his ankle. That was the last time we tried that. It made the point.

I also did another spot with Bruiser where I helped get his stomach claw over. He came up with the idea for me to regurgitate blood when he used the claw. Of course, the blood came from a condom that I put in my mouth.

Bruiser loved to drink champagne. He always had two or three bottles with him. After leaving Chicago one night, he was driving 100 mph. Dick always did off-the-wall things, but this time, he even scared me. I was yelling, "Stop the car and let me out!"

He just looked at me and grinned, then turned the steering wheel and drove down into a ditch ... still at 100 mph. When he pulled back up onto the road, he said, "Did I scare ya?"

"What do you think?" I asked.

That was the only time I can remember riding with one of my opponents. I had flown into Chicago from Florida and I needed a ride, so we waited until the fans left and I snuck out to Bruiser's car.

A fan walked up to me one time and said, "My grandfather saw the good wrestlers and bad wrestlers all eating together."

I said, "That's funny. I've been wrestling for a long time and I've never seen that."

That was true. It wasn't allowed. If the promoters caught a babyface riding with a heel, they would fire them immediately.

Bruiser was great, but it was a small territory and you didn't work every night. He talked to Eddie Graham and got me booked in Florida. I think Graham felt that I had learned my lesson after being pushed out for a year. Not all of the promoters felt that way, though. The Crocketts wouldn't use me again until the latter part of 1980.

Sam Muchnick was another promoter who treated me well and booked me after the IWA went out of business. I may just be naïve to the fact that he might not have been paying me the same amount of money as my

opponents, but ignorance is bliss if you don’t know it at the time. All I knew is that he featured me and paid me well.

Bruiser flew me back to Indianapolis quite often while I was working the Florida territory and still used me on top. I even won and lost Bruiser’s top belt, the WWA heavyweight title, while I was working full-time in Florida.

When I was in Florida, I had Mr. Saito in my corner as my tag team partner. I first met him when I was in Japan. I respected him. He was a brick house, a tough wrestler, the real thing. He spoke broken English, but he really understood wrestling. I never had to worry about the fans attacking me from behind, either. We watched each others’ back. He was quite an asset to me.

One night in West Palm Beach, Saito was wrestling Steve Keirn in a Sleeper vs Cobra Hold match. When Keirn caught Saito in the sleeper, the referee took a bump. I hit the ring, decked Keirn, and put Saito into position to put the cobra hold on Keirn. As I turned to leave the ring, I saw a big, red-headed guy running up the aisle. I thought to myself, "Don’t tell me this guy is gonna come into the ring."

That was exactly what he had in mind. He came all the way up the aisle, fully intent on stopping me. I was going to try to stop him before he got into the ring, so when he stuck his head through the ropes, I tried to catch him with a boot. I was a little too slow and I missed. He scrambled in and took a swing at me, which also missed. I remember feeling the wind on my nose. I knew that I had to put the guy down quickly, so I countered with a punch to his nose. His nose folded down sideways onto his cheek bone and blood flew everywhere. When he fell to the mat, the police reached in and pulled him out of the ring. He started screaming for the police to arrest me, but they arrested him, instead.

Fans came into the ring quite often. In 1980, when Roddy Piper and I were teaming together in the Charlotte territory, we wrestled against Ric Flair and Wahoo McDaniel in Sumter, South Carolina. As we walked to the ring for our match, a guy stepped out of the audience and sucker punched Roddy. Roddy threw his bagpipes at me and chased the guy down in no time at all, knocking him down to the ground. The cops were supposed to throw the guy out, but they gave him a lecture and let him go.

After we lost the match to Flair and Wahoo by disqualification, and while we were walking back to the dressing room, the guy ran up behind Roddy, with the intent of blind-siding him again. I saw him out of the corner of my eye and beat him to the punch—literally. I hit him and broke his jaw.

We later learned that he was an off-duty Marine soldier on leave. He sued us, and when our lawyer was doing his research, he learned that the guy had become a police officer! The Crocketts settled the case out of court, but Roddy and I shouldn't have been held liable for anything. We had to protect ourselves.

I was happy to have Roddy as my tag team partner in Charlotte. One day, Roddy asked me to meet him at the YMCA for a workout. Johnny Heideman and several other wrestlers were there as well, working out by wrestling on the mats. After we did some running and work with the weights, Roddy suggested that we work out together on the mats. "Let's just try to turn each other over," he said.

Roddy had been a very good amateur wrestler. I didn't have even one day of training in an amateur program, but he assured me that he would take it easy on me. I have to admit—after 15 to 20 minutes of trying to turn each other over from a wrestling stance, on our hands and knees—I blew up. As a "proud Russian," however, I gave it my all and hung in there with him, but I learned that day that Roddy was as tough as nails.

Roddy was a great wrestling partner and I could always count on him to watch my back. He was a good friend to me, as well. I will always be thankful for the good matches and fun times we had together.

Don Muraco and I had many matches together in Florida, Hawaii, and New York. We were good friends, but we didn't stay in touch after we went our separate ways. In 2005, I saw him in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, and he looked a lot like he always did.

In June 1978, I left Florida and went to Atlanta. I don't remember there being any real reason for leaving Florida, other than the fact that I didn't want to get stale. As always, I wanted to get out before the fans got sick and tired of me.

Chapter 12
Motel Room Brawl

I have all the respect in the world for Ole Anderson and I consider him a friend. When Ole was the booker in Atlanta, he always used me as a main event, and I appreciate that he thought enough of me to use me in that spot. He expected a lot out of me and every other wrestler who worked for him, but he would never ask me to do anything in the ring that he wasn’t willing to do himself.

In addition to having great business sense and wrestling skill, Ole was a horse in the ring. Off and on, we wrestled as a tag team for a couple of years. If we wrestled an hour match, or even 90 minutes, he was in the ring just as much as I was, and he always had his hand out for a tag. I also respected him because he was the boss, and yet, he never went into the ring and did things just to put himself over.

Ole and I split up one time when he turned babyface. On November 17, 1979, we did a storyline angle where the commission suspended me. I appeared on TV the following week under a mask with Ernie Ladd as my partner to wrestle Ted Allen and Vinnie Bilotto [aka Vinnie Valentino]. Of course, the people all knew who I was. I felt so claustrophobic in the mask. After that one match, I said, "Ole, you’re gonna have to take this mask off. I can’t breathe in it."

A few nights later at the Atlanta Omni, Ole unmasked me when Ernie and I wrestled Ole and his partner, Thunderbolt Patterson. That was one angle that I was glad was short-lived.

I had long matches with Ole, too, both as his partner and against him when he turned babyface. When we went outside the ring during one match in Augusta, Georgia, he knocked me down. When I fell, my head hit the guard rail that surrounded the ring and I started to bleed buckets of blood. Ole said, "What do you want to do? You need to go to the hospital."

That was one of those situations where we finished the match immediately. There was too much blood. We didn't need a finish. We didn't need a hospital, either. The ambulance attendants took me outside and stitched me up in the ambulance.

To be honest, the fact that I had it done in the ambulance wasn't so much me being tough as it was being cheap. It they had taken me to the hospital, I would have had to pay the charge for the ambulance. I didn't want to sit in the hospital all night long, either. I just wanted to get my head stitched up so I could go home and drink my beer.

Most of the time, if we cut too deep and hit an artery, we would just put a butterfly on it to keep the edges of the cut together. That would last for a day or two, or at least until somebody hit it when you had another match. It would start to bleed again and we would put another butterfly on it. When you do that often enough, that part of your head has trouble healing.

It didn't matter who Abdullah the Butcher or the Sheik wrestled. Every one of their opponents would be bleeding by the end of their match. That was their gimmick. Sheik used a pencil to gouge the foreheads of his opponents. Abdullah was more civilized. He used a fork. Entertainment or not, the people never really knew for sure whether or not the Sheik and Abdullah were for real. They were two scary guys.

Infections were quite common due to the fact that we bled every night and never gave the cuts an opportunity to heal. Many times, blood didn't come from a fresh wound. It came from old wounds being reopened. You could bleed one night, and the next night, your opponent would see the cut and take a swipe at it to get it going again. There were times when I bled every night for months, and I only had to use a blade the first night. I got a staph infection one time, in my head, of all places. My head swelled up and I had terrible headaches.

Dusty Rhodes, Wahoo McDaniel, Ric Flair—we all cut ourselves too often and too deeply, but we all did it to make our matches more exciting. It doesn't take too long before your head is scarred up. Some guys were better than others when it came to cutting themselves, but I saw several guys do it right out in the open. In most cases, the fans never even noticed.

Ole and I did have a confrontation or two. He usually drove to the towns by himself, but one time, he asked if he could ride with me because he didn’t get much rest the night before. We had a full day ahead of us—Atlanta TV in the morning, Columbus, Ohio TV that afternoon, and the Carrollton, Georgia, house show later that night.

When we got on the road, I proceeded to follow my normal routine of smoking marijuana and drinking beer. Ole and I were friends, but he didn’t like anybody doing drugs. He woke up a couple of times and cursed me out, then made a big production out of opening the window.

When Buzz Sawyer and I were tagging up, we partied one night and woke up late the next morning. We made a mad dash to the airport, but missed our flight, and there were no other flights available that would get us to Atlanta in time to make TV. Jim Barnett and Ole were both pretty upset, so they told us to report to the office on Monday. Buzz went in first. When he came out, he said, "Ole fined me $500."

When I walked in, Ole said, "Barnett and I talked about it and we can’t have people missing their bookings, especially TV. TV is important and you guys need to be here. We’re going to fine you $500."

Ole was right, but at that point in my life, I wasn’t exactly what you would call a rational-thinking person. I stood up, took off my sweater, and said, "That’s fine, Ole. You can take the $500 from me, but you’re gonna have to fight me for it. Maybe you’re a tougher fighter than me, but when we’re finished, you’ll know you’ve been in a fight."

I’m not a great fighter, but that’s the way I was. My pride wouldn’t let anybody take $500 away from me easily. Ole stared at me for several seconds and said, "Sit down, Ivan. Look, I have orders from Barnett. I have to fine you."

We discussed the situation, and by the time I left the office, he had lowered the amount of the fine down to $100. And to show you what kind of a guy Ole was, a few months later, when I was leaving the territory, Ole gave me a $200 bonus on my paycheck.

I couldn’t blame Ole. He had a business to run and he was in charge, but looking at it from a wrestler’s point of view, it was a tough lifestyle. Most people wouldn’t be able to hold up to the party life we led, much less being on the road and wrestling every night. Buzz and I only slept three or four hours that night, and that was common, so we were bound to miss a flight sooner or later.

I think my whole problem boiled down to the fact that I didn’t want anything taken out of my check. When you have to pay road expenses and support two homes—my family was living in Charlotte and I was living in an apartment in Atlanta—$500 is a lot of money, even when your check is $1,500.

I enjoyed tagging with Buzz Sawyer, who had been a good amateur wrestler in high school. I don’t know how he did it, but he would eat two hot dogs before he got into the ring to wrestle. It caught up to him one night. He suddenly stopped wrestling, went through the ropes to the arena floor, and crawled underneath the ring. We could hear him vomiting. A few seconds later, he came back into the ring and locked up, as if nothing had happened.

One day on WTBS, I told Buzz, "The way you act, you remind me of Mad Dog Vachon."

I could tell he liked the idea of being referred to as Mad Dog, so I started to call him that on promos. He liked it so much that he began acting like Mad Dog Vachon. He would get down on his hands and knees and bark like a dog.

One time, Buzz Sawyer, another wrestler, myself, and a girl, were in a car, driving from Ohio to West Virginia. The girl wanted to spend some time with the other wrestler in the car. There was nothing sexual going on. We were just drinking beer and having a good time. The girl’s sister, who was also a wrestling fan, followed us. We had planned to pull over at a specific exit to let the girl ride with her sister. When we went past our exit and crossed the state line, the sister panicked and called the police.

Fifteen minutes or so later, helicopters were flying overhead. A few minutes later, the police stopped us and made us get out of the car. When they

started to put handcuffs on us, I said, "No!"

My shoulder was still tender from an operation and it hadn’t totally healed, but they thought I was resisting arrest, so they got a little bit rough. I said, "What is this, Russia or the United States? [That’s irony for you.] There’s no need to put the cuffs on us, but if you insist, please realize that I have a broken shoulder that was just operated on. I’d appreciate it if you didn’t break it again. I’ll put my arms behind me, but take it easy."

They finally seemed to understand what I was getting at, so they loosened the cuffs and had us lie down on the ground until they verified our stories with the girl.

They searched the car and found some marijuana and pills. We were lucky. They could have taken us in for that alone! Instead, they threw it all into a ditch.

That was one of the high spots of my wrestling career.

Alexis Smirnoff and I found ourselves in hot water when we made a crack about Veteran’s Day on television. Of course, as always, we talked in our heavy, Russian accents. There were so many complaint calls made to the police station that the FBI was called in to investigate. They showed up at the arena in Augusta and asked to see our passports. Of course, we immediately dropped the Russian accent. "I’m just trying to make a living portraying a Russian. I’m actually a Canadian. I’ve never even been to Russia."

You could look at that as an expose of the business, but I had to be honest with those guys. You don’t mess around with the FBI. After I showed them my passport, they said, "All right, but tone it down a little. Don’t say things like that anymore."

I tag teamed with Buzz one night against Tommy Rich and Stan Hansen when we were running the Ohio-West Virginia tours out of the Atlanta office. The match was billed as a Street Fight and the crowd was really with it. We wrestled hard to please them and we were sweaty and thirsty when

we finished, so on the way home, Buzz and I stopped at a convenience store to buy some chips and beer.

When I left the store, I walked out by myself. As I approached our car, two guys walked up and one of them started to tell me that we didn't even know what a street fight was. I just stayed in character, talking with my Russian accent and trying to bluff him. As the conversation progressed, he said that he was going to show me what a real street fight was. Of course, I wasn't one to back down from a challenge, so I said, "Oh, is that right? Let me just put this bag down and we'll see about that."

As I put the bag on the sidewalk, I watched him closely, to be sure he didn't try to sucker-punch me. All of a sudden, Buzz came out of the store like a runaway locomotive. He must have known what was going down because he was all over the guy. He manhandled him and threw him around like he was a rag doll. Buzz let him know in no uncertain terms that we did know how to street fight, and demonstrated his knowledge of that by rubbing the guy's face in the asphalt of the parking lot. The thing that really got me was that I felt like I was in a movie. A police car came roaring up with the sirens blaring. The cop jumped out of the car and laid his arms on the top, with his gun aimed at Buzz. "Drop that man!" he yelled.

Buzz must have realized what was going on because he just threw the guy to the ground. They proceeded to arrest Buzz and I had to go to the police station to post a $50 bond.

The guy had asked for everything he got. He was the one who instigated the incident and caused the problem. We weren't looking for trouble. We were just looking forward to drinking our beer while making the long drive home.

Buzz was a good friend who looked out for his friends, both inside the ring and out, and he certainly was looking out for me that night. God bless him.

For some reason, I was the official referee for contests that took place away from the arenas. Buzz Sawyer and Iron Sheik, who both had backgrounds as amateur wrestlers, started to argue about who was the better man. Eventually, the beer they had drank started to talk and their bantering with

each other led to one challenging the other to an amateur match. They asked me to referee their match, which was going to take place in our hotel room. They did their best to beat each other. The contest started on the bed, but they wrestled all over the room, knocking the TV and lamps off of the dresser in the process.

It was a knock-down, drag-out, amateur wrestling match with no holds barred. I was jumping over the beds, trying to stay with them to make the count if one happened to pin the other. They went full-tilt for a good 20 minutes before they blew up and called the match a draw. They were both happy and laughing when it was over. The motel room, however, was a wreck.

I refereed a match one night between Brian Blair and Matt Borne, but it didn’t take place in the ring. It took place at a bar in Ohio. When Matt said something to a girl that Brian was talking to, he and Brian started to argue. The manager of the bar said, "If you two guys want to fight, take it outside."

That’s exactly what they did. They went outside and started to fight. Brian had the edge on wrestling, but Matt was the dirty fighter. When Matt went to pluck out one of Brian’s eyes, I designated myself as the referee and kicked his hands away. "Keep this clean."

During the five years that I was in Georgia, I would make occasional trips into the Florida and Charlotte territories. In 1981, Ray Stevens and I were tag team partners in the Carolinas. He was one of the best partners I ever had. Not only was Ray a great worker, but he was a lot of fun to be around. Everybody loved him. I admired him as a wrestler, as a person, and as a character. Outside the ring, he was a wild man, and he always carried a gun with him.

One night, we were dressing in the basement of a high school. When I spotted Ray on the far side of the dressing room, I put my bag, black cape, fur hat, and jacket on a chair. Whenever Ray giggled, you knew that he was up to something. As I walked towards him, he pulled out his gun and put a bullet through my hat. I don’t know if he was aiming at my hat, but if he was, he was a crack shot because it was a long way from where he stood to where my hat was. I said, "Ray! That’s my hat!"

No sooner were the words out of my mouth when he aimed again and put a bullet through the shoulder of my jacket. I knew that Ray was just fooling around and it was forgotten almost as soon as it happened.

Another time, we were celebrating Swede Hanson's birthday. There were quite a few of us packed in a van and we stopped on the side of the interstate to use the restroom. It was late and I was tired, so I took time to finish my business. All of a sudden, a loud explosion went off. It was Ray, trying to get my attention by firing his gun. I had been drinking [of course], so I didn't react. Ray fired the gun again, only this time, he held it close to my ear. I couldn't help but register that one because it felt like it pulverized my eardrum.

I wrestled Stan Hansen many times in Georgia. Even though he weighed 300 pounds, he was in good cardiovascular shape. Ole and I had several 60-minute and 90-minute matches with Stan Hansen and Tommy Rich. That was a long time to wrestle, especially considering the fact that we wrestled hard and tried to make our matches look as believable as possible.

One night, when Stan and I were wrestling, I took a bump backwards and hit my head on the rail that surrounded the ring. I had a huge gash in the back of my head and I was bathed in blood. Things like that happened. It was like wrestling with a brother, or a friend. You start out slow and try to keep your cool, but it evolves into a real battle and things get out of control. It didn't help that we wrestled seven days a week. We were tired, cranky, and our temper was on a short fuse.

In April 1983, when I was finishing up in the Atlanta territory, and getting ready to leave for New York, I decided to do a favor for Stan. I admired Stan and had a lot of respect for him. We were wrestling in a Loser Leave Town match. I wanted to put him over and make it look as realistic as possible, so I bloodied myself up and went outside the ring, refusing to get back in until he came out and dropped me with a piledriver—on the concrete floor of the arena. I carried it further by pretending to be injured. In those days, they always had an ambulance standing by. The paramedics came to ringside and took me to the hospital.

Chapter 13
Missed Opportunity

In April 1983, I went back to work for the WWWF. I had many matches with Bob Backlund, the WWWF champion. He was great to work with. Most people don’t realize how strong Bob really is. When we were wrestling one night in 1983, he picked me up with one arm and set me on the top turnbuckle.

I also suffered my first knee injury when I was working on television with Bob. When I turned towards the cameras, I turned too quickly and tore the cartilage in my left knee. I knew it was going to be a bad injury. I was in good shape, and I had lost a lot of weight, but it was one of those freak things that happens. The only way to loosen it was to lay still, so we went into a rest hold. After a short time, my knee unlocked and we continued with our match.

It had to be a chore for Bob because after relaxing, my knee would stop hurting, but as soon as I twisted it a little, I would feel a sharp pain again. The cartilage was torn, so there wasn’t much I could do to stop the pain for very long. Almost as soon as we made a move, I would say, "Bob, my knee’s locked up again," and he would apply a hold that allowed me to lie on the mat for a few seconds until the pain settled.

That was the first time I remember having trouble with one of my knees. I suffered from the problem for the six of the eight months that I was in the Northeast.

Another incident, which took place in 1983, was (as usual) my fault. After a 10-month series of matches with Bob Backlund in New York, Vince McMahon Jr. booked me, Curt Hennig [aka Mr. Perfect], Mr. Fuji, Adrian Adonis, the Iron Sheik, and others, on a tour of the Middle East. Most of our tour took place in Kuwait and we lived on a Marriott Hotel ship, a ship turned into a hotel right there in Kuwait.

When we left the New York airport, we were told we could bring a bottle of duty-free alcohol. During our flight, we had a few drinks. When we got too rowdy, the flight attendants stopped serving us. I wasn't going to let that put an end to our party, so I took a quart of vodka out of my bag and Adrian Adonis and I took turns drinking from it.

When Adrian said he had enough and wanted to go to sleep, I got upset with him. The bottle was about half empty, so I downed what remained and threw the bottle at him, hitting his leg. He yelled at me to leave him alone. I stood and made my way to the front of the plane, talking to foreign people as I went. I'm sure they didn't understand a word. When I sat on a table where four people were playing a board game, they just took it in stride and started to laugh at me.

Eventually, I made my way to the other side of the plane, where Mr. Fuji and the Iron Sheik were talking. As I approached them, the Iron Sheik walked off, so I started talking to Mr. Fuji. When Sheik came back a few minutes later, Fuji told him to leave. He explained to Sheik that it wouldn't be good for business if opponents were seen socializing in public. The Russians were definitely the bad guys in that part of the world, and since Kuwait was his former home, he would be the babyface and I would probably have to wrestle him.

The Sheik reluctantly walked away, only to return a few minutes later. Once again, Fuji asked him to leave, and he did. I don't remember any of the details, but after I sobered up, I was told what happened. When Sheik came back a third time to see if we had finished our conversation, I slapped him very hard, knocking him down. When he stood up, he took me down to the floor with a leg dive. While we scuffled, he bit me on the left side of my neck.

After breaking us apart, Fuji put me in a seat and tightened my seat belt. I went in and out for a few minutes, and each time I regained consciousness, I wanted to continue my fight with Sheik. Each time I woke, Mr. Fuji would tighten the seat belt even tighter. I'm sure my waist must have been about 20 inches when he finished.

When we landed in Jordan, I woke up, unbuckled my seat belt, and went to the bathroom. I was shocked when I looked into the mirror. My eyes were bloodshot, a chunk of flesh missing from the side of my neck, and my shoulders and side were covered in blood.

When we landed in Jordan, the police stormed onto the plane, and each of them was armed with a machine gun. Even though my memory of the incident is foggy, I remember being so scared. Fuji did a good job of talking to them and they didn't arrest us. As I walked through the airport, even after our close call, I was still angry and I wanted to continue the fight. I had no recollection of the fight itself, so I just could not understand why the Sheik had bit me. Being so drunk, I couldn't have been that much of a threat. To this day, I still have a scar on my neck that resembles a hammer and sickle —courtesy of Iron Sheik. Sheik and I never held a grudge against each other and we went on to wrestle as a tag team in later years.

After leaving the Middle East, I returned to the States and made a few more shots for Vince. When I gave my notice in December, Vince McMahon Jr. asked me if I wanted to stay around longer. They had a big program they wanted me to be a part of. I was having a lot of trouble with my knee and I needed a rest, so I turned them down. "I appreciate you offering me the opportunity, but I need some time off for health issues, and I have to get back to my family."

"That's fine, Ivan," said Vince. "I just wanted you to know that we'd like to have you stay with us."

In hindsight, I probably should have accepted their offer. After I gave them my decision, I was told their plan was to have Bob Backlund drop the WWWF title to me. A few weeks later, I would lose it to Hulk Hogan in the Garden. The spot they originally planned for me went to the Iron Sheik. I don't have any real regrets over not accepting their offer, but being involved and winning the belt again definitely would have enhanced my career. At the time, I was hurting so badly that I didn't even take time to stop and think about it. All I knew was that I needed some time off to rest and recuperate.

On December 26, 1983, in Madison Square Garden, the Iron Sheik made history when he won the strap from Backlund. In an earlier match on the card, I did a job for Tito Santana.

From the very beginning of my career, I was business-oriented. I never looked at myself as a superstar. Whenever I looked at the other guys, I always saw them as being on a level above me. I always thought they were better than I was. That was probably a good thing because I always had a goal. I was constantly striving to reach their level. I often wonder, though, why somebody like Sam Muchnick would pay for my plane ticket, fly me into St. Louis, and pay me good money … just to have me team with two other guys in a six-man tag team match that we were going to lose!

Perhaps it was because I never hesitated or argued when a promoter asked me to do a job. The promoters didn’t want to deal with someone who would say, "No, I’m not going to do that!" If you were a big enough star, you could get away with saying that, but I never thought of myself that way.

Chapter 14
The Daily Ritual

During the five years that I was in Atlanta, my weight had increased to over 300 pounds. In his book, Inside Out, Ole said that I took steroids. He was wrong about that because, as I stated earlier, I never took steroids after the time I was with Superstar. I weighed 300 pounds when I beat Bruno, and I was steroid-free then, too. I can understand how Ole might have come to that conclusion because I took plenty of other drugs, but I want people to know that I was a 300-pounder without steroids.

Life on the road was very hectic and most territories had long trips. It was a constant series of, "Hurry up! We've got to go!"

Imagine having a schedule like this, seven days a week, every week:

Get up in the morning, with a hangover.

Get something to eat.

Go to the gym for a workout.

Meet other wrestlers at a pre-arranged place.

Take a 200 to 300 mile trip crammed into a small car with three other huge wrestlers.

Grab a quick bite to eat at a fast food restaurant.

Get to the town an hour before the show.

Put on your wrestling gear and warm up.

Wrestle.

Have a party.

Sleep over at a motel.

And the cycle starts over again the next morning.

Get up in the morning, with a hangover.

Etc., etc., etc.

One of the reasons you party is to attempt to fill your life with some happiness. You spend long, boring hours in a car, separated from your family. There's no normalcy to your life. You're in a different town every night. Often, you don't get home for several days. In some ways, it's exciting, but in other ways, it becomes drudgery because it's something you have to do. It's how you make your living.

If you have a sprained ankle or dislocated shoulder, you still have to get into the ring, so you try to cover up the aches and pains with drugs. In order to dull the pain so you can sleep at night, you drink alcohol. When we were working out daily and wrestling nightly, we were able to sweat a lot of the chemicals out of our bodies, but eventually, the drugs and alcohol begin to take a toll on our minds and bodies.

I'm not saying I was all that unhappy, but I was never clear-headed enough to realize how I was being affected by drugs and alcohol. All I knew was that I needed a crutch. If I didn't use them, I couldn't do my job, and if I couldn't do my job, I would be replaced. It didn't even matter if we showed up at the arenas in a state of drunkenness, or under the influence of drugs. The promoters didn't care, as long as we were able to do our job.

As everyone knows, Ole Anderson was all business. He didn't mix business and pleasure. If drinking or drugs hampered anybody when it came to doing what they had to do in the ring, then Ole would set them straight in no uncertain terms. His bottom line was, if you were able to produce and do what was expected of you, Ole wouldn't complain or pry into your personal life.

On the other hand, Ole hated recreational drugs, and everybody knew it. Now I can see why. He was right in that sense, but a lot of us thought that was the only way we could keep our sanity and follow the schedule of wrestling seven days a week and having to wrestle with injuries.

To me, drugs and alcohol became a daily ritual. I used all types of painkillers because I was in a lot of pain. In fact, I got hooked on the pain killers. I don't know whether it was something my body desired, or if I had just reached a point where I thought it was. All I knew was that I was looking for relief from my back pain. As far as recreational drugs go, I didn't do crack cocaine, but I did do cocaine. I can remember spending up to $1,600 at one time to purchase drugs.

During my career, I had three arthroscopic knee operations due to injuries, all of which were to repair torn cartilage. Most of the injuries stemmed from dropping onto my opponents with a knee drop from the top rope. When you perform a knee drop, all of your weight comes down onto your bent knee. When you do that night after night for years, your knees suffer a lot of damage. The pain from torn cartilage is terrible and the only way you can get it to ease up was to relax and concentrate.

Of course, eventually, you have to get up and do something. You can't lay on the mat in a rest hold for the whole match. Many times, when you finally do move, you can't keep yourself from groaning from the pain and grabbing your knee. Of course, if your opponent doesn't know about your problem, he thinks you're playing to the audience, so the logical thing for him to do is to start working on the knee. That's the very last thing you want him to do. Hopefully, you get the message to your opponent before he damages your knee too badly, and tell him that you want him to work on the other, uninjured knee.

When I left the Northeast and went back to the Carolinas, I was able to take some time off to have surgery. The doctors discovered pseudo-gout in my leg, which is crystallized gout. They weren't able to scope it out at the time because my uric acid levels were high. They just closed up the incision and let it go.

I’m sure I’ll have to get a knee replacement one day. When I walk, my knee will suddenly shoot off to the right, and it looks like I’m taking an illegal turn. It doesn’t do that often, but it’s painful when it does.

I bruised my leg outside the ring one night. I whacked my ankle against the guard rail and I felt a sharp pain. I didn’t think too much about it, but by that evening, my ankle had turned black and swelled up. I knew it was a serious injury because a red line had started to creep up the inside of my leg. Within a day or two, puss was oozing from the cut where I had hit my ankle against the railing. When the doctors discovered that I had developed a staph infection, I was admitted to the hospital and stayed there for three days. They had to drain my ankle three times a day and put me on a triple dose of Keflex IV antibiotics. I had to write a note of permission for the doctor to exceed the maximum dosage. He told me that if I wanted to double the amount, I had to sign a release. I wanted the max—a triple dose—because my fever wasn’t breaking and I wanted something that would kill the infection.

I was concerned about it because I couldn’t wrestle with the infection in my leg. Wrestlers don’t get paid when they’re sitting in a hospital and there’s always the risk that you’ll be replaced by other talent. When I finally convinced the doctors to release me, I was given a Betadine solution to pump into the hole in my leg. It was quite aggravating because I had to disinfect the wound before and after every match. The guys who saw me dress the wound thought I was crazy to even be in the ring, but it was something I felt I had to do. To this day, I can feel a small hole in the bone, but it healed up and it gives me no problem.

My ankle is easily twice the size it should be. It looks like a club foot. I can feel bone spurs underneath the skin and my big toe has no feeling in it whatsoever. I plan to have it worked on when I get old.

Old is when I reach my 90th birthday.

I hurt my right shoulder in Florida in the late ‘70s when I smashed it into the ring post. That wasn’t something that happened accidentally. I used to try to move the ring by hitting the post. I did it once too often and broke my shoulder. It was only a hairline fracture, but I knew there was something

wrong because it turned black and blue. I didn't do anything about it for a few months, but when the injury prevented me from raising my arm much higher than chest level, I went to the doctor. The x-rays showed that I had bone spurs in my shoulder.

The doctor suggested I come in and undergo an operation. After the operation, he recommended that I take three months off. He conceded that If I could at least rest and not use it for five to six weeks, I might be able to work on a limited basis. I couldn't do either option. I went back to work the very next day.

We wrestled eight to nine times a week in the Georgia territory. You can't wrestle that often and not develop injuries, but what most people don't realize is that wrestlers didn't [and don't] have health insurance, disability insurance, or a retirement plan. If you got hurt, you had better be tough enough to go back to work immediately, or you would lose your spot.

Fortunately, the only thing Ole expected me to do was to make an appearance. He told me that if I kept my arm in a sling, I could stand outside the ring. I did that for three weeks. I also had an opportunity to go to Louisiana and do some things there with the sling to see if I was ready to return to work. After a few weeks, I worked in a few matches with Buck Robley and Bill Watts. I tried to favor my right arm as much as I could, but it was sore and irritated. As time went on, the pain lessened and I was able to return to a full-time schedule. The operation shortened my arm and the movement is still limited, but I don't have a lot of pain.

I had another shoulder dislocated during a match with Ric Flair in Columbia, South Carolina. I was doing a move off the top rope where I grab him by the hair and put my knee in the back of his head, with the intent to ride him down to the mat, face first. Ric reached up and grabbed me by the wrist, then flipped me off the ropes. My foot slipped off the rope and I landed on my shoulder, tearing the rotor cuff.

Flair was such a great pro. He knew there was something wrong with my shoulder, but he continued with the match and carried me through for seven more minutes. He held my arm immobile with a short arm scissors for the remaining time, all the while, pretending to work the shoulder. Believe me.

I didn’t have a lot of trouble expressing pain in the shoulder because I had it. When I got back to the dressing room, we tried to pop it back into place. Even the Iron Sheik pulled on it, but nothing worked.

In 1973, when I ruptured the disc in my back, the doctors wanted to operate, but I wouldn’t do it. I started to do ambulatory traction and was introduced to the pills—pain pills, sleeping pills, and muscle relaxers. I got hooked on prescription meds. I suppose I looked at them as a crutch. They helped so much by relieving my pain, but even after I healed up, my body craved the medicine.

In all, I’ve had two ruptured discs in my back, which causes my leg to fall asleep when I stand on it for more than 30 minutes. As a matter of fact, I have trouble walking after standing on it for an hour. If I can sit down, it eases the pain, but I have serious problems in my back that really need to be addressed.

When the muscles in one area of the body are damaged, it puts a strain on the muscles in the surrounding areas, which can lead to other complications. One night, when I went to reverse throwing somebody into the turnbuckles, I tore a bicep muscle. Later, while working out at Ricky Steamboat’s gym in Charlotte, I tore a triceps muscle. I was alternating leg work on the bench with pullovers for the triceps. I was trying to get some definition into my triceps. I didn’t have a lot of weight on the machine, but I had enough for a good burn and I was working like a maniac, trying to build up my cardiovascular condition. In the middle of my third set, I heard something pop. It sounded like a gun being fired. A half second later, excruciating pain went through my triceps. I had never had anything hurt quite that much. Of course, I dropped the weights. Luckily, they didn’t land on my face. I didn’t go to the hospital, but the triceps muscle swelled up and turned black.

Cracked ribs are painful, too. Whether you get a cracked rib on the guard rail outside the ring, by landing on somebody’s knee, or by somebody kicking out of a pinfall situation, it’s a painful experience. I cracked several ribs during my career, but I never went to the hospital. I just wrapped them up and tried to favor them until they got better.

One night, I had a 45-minute match with Alexis Smirnoff against Kevin Sullivan and Steve Travis. The next morning, my hip and back really bothered me. I could barely walk, but I went to the gym, thinking that I could work it out. If that failed, I would put heat on it or get a massage. Nothing I did that day seemed to help. That night, I was telling somebody in the gym about my hip. He said, "It sounds like your hip is out of place. I'm a licensed chiropractor. Sit down on this bench."

I thought he was ribbing me, but he seemed to know what he was talking about. I wasn't going to argue the fact because I was willing to try anything to get some relief from the pain. When I sat down on the bench, he put me in an abdominal stretch kind of hold and told me to relax. All of a sudden, he twisted and gave my body a jerk. I heard and felt my hip pop back into place. I wish I could find that guy today.

I know that I need to lose some weight. I'm up to about 260 pounds, but by the time this book is out, there's going to be a significant change in me. The aches and pains will still be there, possibly for as long as I'm alive, but a decrease in weight will put less strain on my back and knees.

The Lord talks in His Word about thorns in the flesh. Maybe my aches and pains force me to be more dependent on Him. I know one thing for sure. The Lord allows us to go through trials in order to bring us closer to Him. Regardless of our situation, we need to praise and glorify Him every day, all day long.

As the number of my injuries increased, so did the amount of drugs I took, to a point where they began to cause me a lot of problems. In the late '70s, when I was in Florida, I was only smoking marijuana and taking a lot of pills—amphetamines [speed]. By the time I arrived in New York in 1983, cocaine had become my drug of choice.

In essence, I was my own worst enemy.

Every three weeks, we would go to Allentown, Pennsylvania, to tape television. When we walked into the dressing room, the doctor was waiting with the drugs we had ordered—Placydil, Valium, speed, or whatever drug we wanted. Everybody would put in their orders, spending anywhere from

$200 to $500, and even more! We had to have it because we were in constant pain from the bumps and falls. The problems started, however, when we abused the use of those drugs and became addicted to them.

I would get up in the morning, usually with a terrible hangover. I would swallow a Black Beauty [speed], to get me going. After grabbing a quick bite to eat [which was usually a small portion because I was trying to lose weight at that time], I would smoke a doobie [marijuana joint]. I did downers. I did uppers. I would take one thing to get myself going, the other to get me back down.

That was the extent of my drug use in the morning. Later in the day, I would pop a pain killer like a Seconal or Tuinal. I smoked marijuana up to the time of my match.

In the dressing room at the arenas, I got serious and broke out the cocaine. I would do a line [a small amount of cocaine arranged in a thin line and snorted through a dollar bill] to get myself ready for my match. When the match was over, I would smoke more marijuana and take more pain pills. When I got home, it was time for cocaine, whiskey, and beer.

After a match, I did a little bit of drinking. There was a time in my life when I drank before a match, but I normally reserved that vice for afterwards.

I did so many stupid things when I was under the influence. While we were in New York in 1976, while Bugsy McGraw and I were drinking, we went down into the subway. We had heard that gangs gathered there and were threatening people. We decided that we would go down and teach them a lesson. Once again, the alcohol was making decisions for me. As we walked down the steps, a police car pulled up. One of the cops leaned out the window and asked, "Where are you guys going?"

"We’re lookin’ for some gangs to fight," Bugsy answered.

"Well, you’d better take more than your fists. They have guns and knives down there."

Needless to say, we didn’t go down into the subway.

One night, one of the boys said, "There’s a party going on where you can get all the drugs you want."

I was all for it. When we arrived, there were no less than twelve people there. If they recognized me, they didn’t show it because they left me alone. The first thing I saw when we walked into the apartment was a huge pile of cocaine and marijuana. There were so many drugs there that if the police had raided the apartment, I would have been put in jail for the rest of my life.

I would drive down the street, pull to the side of the road where the dealers stood, and ask, "Got any coke?"

The guy would pull out a bag from underneath his jacket and I would buy two grams.

Looking back on it, it was stupid for me to do something like that, but I never thought twice about what the consequences might be. I was well-known to the general public and people recognized me on the street all of the time. But when you’re under the influence of drugs, you don’t bother to think about the consequences that might result from your actions. I suppose it’s hard for the average, non-drug user to understand, but the drugs make you feel ten feet tall. You would probably fight King Kong if he stepped into your territory. You feel like Superman. Nothing can hurt you or touch you, and you feel like you can take care of any situation. Unfortunately, that was how I felt most of the time. It was crazy to do things like that, but I felt like I needed the drugs because I was on the road constantly and my whole body would ache.

I will never forget the time when I stopped at a store in Virginia and saw a guy that I recognized as a big fan, but I couldn’t remember where I had met him or any personal details about him. Don’t ask me what possessed me to ask such a question to somebody I couldn’t even remember, but I asked him if he knew where I could get a doobie [marijuana joint].

"Just a minute," he said. He went to his SUV and came back with a dime bag [an amount of marijuana that sells for $10] and gave it to me. I thanked him and got back into my car.

As I watched him drive away, I saw the words "Drug Task Force" written on the back. I just sat there in shock for several minutes. He must have gotten the drugs from a previous drug bust. I was scared to death that he would follow me and arrest me for drug possession, but he didn't. It wasn't until I was several miles away that I took a deep breath of relief, followed by several more deep breaths each time I thought about it. It was just another dumb move on my part.

Around 1983, during my wrestling years with WWWF, I was renting an apartment in the New Haven, Connecticut, area. I had been referred to the apartment complex by a man that I had met named Dwayne—a state bureau investigator.

One night, I decided to stop at Denny's Restaurant to get something to eat before returning to my apartment. I don't remember if I finished my meal or not, but the restaurant manger woke me up to ask if I was alright and I had answered, "Yes."

As I slid out of the booth and got to my feet, I fell down face first onto the floor. The manager immediately called the police. As luck would have it (or so I thought during that time), somebody had recognized my name and called my friend Dwayne. Dwayne and another guy came to my aid and drove me and my car back to my apartment. They must have seen the alcohol, marijuana, and drug paraphernalia in my car, so I was very thankful that he didn't arrest me. But the next day he sternly advised me to "stop doing drugs and alcohol." He told me, "If it happens again, Ivan, you'll be in serious trouble and I won't be able to help you."

Another incident happened when we arrived at our hotel at about four o'clock in the morning after we had wrestled in a town up north. While I was getting some things out of the trunk of my car, three guys walked up to me. At that time of night, there was nobody else around, and the other boys went into the motel, so for a second or two, I was worried. One of the guys was holding a knife and saying something in a foreign language. I knew

that I had my gun in the trunk, but I didn’t have time to get it. I leaned back, reached under my car seat, and pulled out a knife that had a 12-inch blade. They didn’t waste any time making a hasty retreat.

That was another example of my crazy thinking. There was a mandatory five-year sentence for carrying an unregistered gun in New York during that time, but I kept it in my trunk in case I found myself in a bad situation. Fortunately, I never had to use it, and thank God that I couldn’t get to it that night because I might have used it. Luckily, those guys backed off at the sight of the knife.

One time, I was making a trip to West Virginia for a wrestling match. I was so messed up on marijuana that I suddenly realized that I didn’t know where I was going. I had to pull over to the side of the road, look at my date book to see what town I was booked in, and what time I needed to be there. When I looked at my date book, I had to look at my watch to see the date and time. That’s a pathetic story, but it’s true.

I once made a trip to Asheboro, North Carolina, but on my arrival, I discovered that it was a dry town. I traveled all the way to the next county to get a 12-pack of beer and started to drink on the way back to Asheboro. When I got back into town, a policeman pulled me over and gave me a warning ticket for having a headlight out. I counted my lucky stars that night because I had the 12-pack between my feet when he wrote the ticket.

On another occasion, the last thing I remembered was getting into my car to make a 300-mile trip. The next thing I knew, I woke up in a ditch. I walked back to the hotel with a knife in my hands, found Don Kernodle, and asked to borrow his car. "I need it because I have to go out and buy some more booze."

"Ivan," he said, "I … why are you holding a knife?"

When I didn’t answer, he realized what I was doing. "I love you like a brother, Ivan," he said, "but you’re not getting my car."

Don did the right thing by refusing to give me the car. I realized that Don was a legitimate tough guy, so I backed off.

One night, while I was in the ring in Rochester, New York, I was strung out on a combination of drugs and alcohol. When I climbed up onto the top rope, the whole building began to spin around. As I prepared for a kneedrop onto Rocky Johnson's neck, my right foot began to slip. Rocky did the counter to the knee-drop, the same move that Ric Flair and a lot of other guys used, by grabbing my wrist to pull me off of the ropes. As he did, I lost my balance and fell. I turned halfway as I did the flip off, but I didn't turn far enough and I landed on the back of my head. When my head hit the mat, I felt like an electric shock coursed through my entire body, and I couldn't move. I was actually paralyzed for a few seconds.

Nobody ever said anything to me about the incident, but I'm sure they could tell that I was shaken. It could have been a lot worse. I was lucky that I wasn't paralyzed for life. Thank God that I had somebody as good as Rocky Johnson in the ring, or else it would have been harder to get through the remainder of the match.

The Samoans [Afa and Sika Anoai] and I were in an Allentown bar one night, shortly after the Russians accidentally shot down a U.S. airplane. A guy at the bar started to yell at me, "Go back home! You Commie bast—ds shouldn't be allowed in America!"

When I ignored him, he came over and sat down at our table. He didn't stop his tirade, either. He kept mouthing off until I yelled, "Get out of here! Leave us alone!"

When he refused to shut up and leave, Afa picked up a pencil and jabbed it into his forehead. The pencil went in deep enough that it hung there when Afa let it go. The guy freaked out! He jumped up and ran out of the door, with Uncle Ivan in hot pursuit. I was doing my Russian thing as I chased him. He must have been pretty scared because he outran me. When I went back to the bar, we all had a big laugh about it.

In the early '80s, while making a trip by myself from West Palm Beach to Orlando, I smoked a marijuana joint that somebody had laced with PCP [phencyclidine], or angel dust, as it was known. As I smoked it, I thought, "Wow, what is this?"

When the PCP hit me, I felt like I was driving 100 miles an hour, but actually, I was only doing about 30 to 40 miles an hour, and I was on the freeway. I also felt like I was floating about 30 feet above the highway and looking down. It took me twice as long to make the trip as it normally did. It was such a rush, but it was also stupid to do such a thing. I had other, similar experiences with PCP.

I saw a lot of weird stuff when I was hallucinating. One night, I was drinking beer in a nightclub, and the beer bottles started to pulsate and breathe, as if they were alive. Another time, after I took some blotter acid [a method of delivering LSD into the bloodstream], the pretzels began crawling around the table like worms. My body must have been strong to stand up to the abuse that I put it through, not only in the ring, but outside, as well.

We did everything in the fast lane and ran wide open. We were definitely going the wrong way down the freeway of life.

Chapter 15
Nikita

When I left the WWWF at the end of 1983, I went back to Charlotte, North Carolina, where I made my home. As it turned out, my "rest and recuperation" time only lasted one week. Jim Crockett Sr. was a good friend to me and put me to work immediately.

I had a lot of embarrassing things happen to me in the Carolinas. Most of the time, we wore underwear underneath our wrestling trunks, but there was a period of time when I didn’t. One night, while adjusting my trunks in the ring, I realized that part of me was hanging out from below! I never realized it. There was something else that I didn’t realize.

One of the fans took a picture of it and sent it to me a few days later.

Another time, Ronnie Garvin reached up and pulled my tights down in the back. He was trying to embarrass me by exposing a little bit of crack, but my whole butt came out. When I pulled my tights back up, I complained to the referee, and pulled them down again to demonstrate what he did. Of course, everybody started to laugh—the referee, Ronnie, and the audience. When Ronnie and I locked up in the center of the ring, he said, "Don’t ever do that again!"

Ronnie had a lot of credibility in the ring. He was and is a great friend. He was a great worker who had a lot of credibility from both his peers and the fans. I respect and admire him as being one of the greatest workers ever. Whenever I saw him walking to the ring, I knew the fans were in for a treat because he made every match a good one. He could really handle himself in the ring, too. When you were in the ring with Ronnie, you knew he wasn’t somebody you could push around. If you tried, he was more than capable of pushing back.

Jay Youngblood was such a great performer in the ring. Don Kernodle and I were wrestling Jay and his brother, Mark. I don’t know why he did it, but Jay came into the ring and scratched my bald head with his fingernails. It peeled the skin off my head, so I didn’t have any choice other than to react. I got upset and shouted at Jay. He knew I was upset, but he kept laughing.

Unfortunately, Jay suffered a ruptured spleen during a tag team match in New Zealand, and then had three heart attacks. When he died, he was only 30 years old.

I’ll never forget the night a fan died during the matches. The fans were really into my match. As I was leaving the ring, there was a big group of people crowded around someone on the floor. I thought somebody had just passed out, so I pushed on down the aisle and shouted, "Get up, you stupid American!"

A few minutes later, we were told that the fan had died of a heart attack. I had no way of knowing and I certainly couldn’t have helped him, but I felt very badly about that.

Having a good referee is a big asset to having good matches. They need to turn their head, just for an instant, to give you enough time for the hair pull. If he makes it too obvious, then the fans’ heat goes onto him, and not you. On the other hand, it takes a smart wrestler to avoid putting the referee into a situation where he looks like an idiot. Every so often, you have to let the referee catch you doing your dirty work. He can discipline you and keep things under control, which gives him authority in the eyes of the fans.

Two of my favorite referees were Teddy Long and Randy "Pee Wee" Anderson, but in my opinion, Tommy Young was one of the premier referees. Tommy was so helpful in the ring, moving all around and passing along information. If I got something in my eye, I would tell Tommy, "I’ve got something in my eye. Stall for time!" He would do whatever he had to do to give me a respite.

I look back on my life now and think how foolish I was to do some of the things I did, but with such a tough schedule, traveling on the road seven days a week, and trying to recover from injuries, we looked for anything

that would give us some relief from the pressure. When I look back now and see the hurt that I caused people, including those in my own family, I regret so many things that I did.

If I could go back and live my life over again, one thing that I would never change is the fact that I was a wrestler. I guess the idea of being an entertainer just gets in your blood. The ability to control the emotions of the crowd was such a rush. In a way, performing as a professional wrestler was a drug in itself.

I saw and felt the intensity of the fans, who threw knives, chairs, ice, rocks, and nails at me. They believed what they saw happen in the ring, to a point where they became so involved with the action that they tried to physically fight me as I walked to and from the ring. I don't think most of them really knew what they were doing. It was like the time when I attacked Sailor Clark in Hamilton, Ontario. My subconscious just took over and I acted without thinking.

At times, we might be tired from our match, or stressed out by something that had been going on in our lives. If somebody booted me in the rear end, or hit me in the side as I walked by, I would lash out, reacting out of instinct, although I'm sure that at times, I reacted out of pride. Most of the time, however, we reacted violently because we didn't want to wait until somebody sank a knife into us. We didn't have time to determine whether the fan was a threat to us or not. Ole Anderson was stabbed by a frail, 79-year-old man, and it took more than 100 stitches to close the wound.

For the most part, though, the fans reserved their activities to yelling and screaming at the heels, but at times, they wouldn't hesitate to kick or throw a punch at us. That was one reason why I always loved having a partner like Dick Murdoch, who didn't hesitate to knock out anybody who stepped over the line.

As the bad guy, not only were you open to attack by an unruly fan, but you were always in a bad spot because you had the constant worry about being sued. If a fan assaulted you, you stood a better than even chance of winding up in court. And in many cases, even though we were essentially entertainers, the judge looked at us as professional fighters, and expected us

to know how to defend ourselves without inflicting punishment on the transgressor.

I know the fans still get into wrestling today, but they only see it as entertainment. In fact, the fans themselves refer to it as sports entertainment. They don't have the same feelings about the matches that the fans did 20 years ago. Part of that is due to the fact that the time the guys spend in the ring—typically five to fifteen minutes—doesn't allow them enough time to build the emotion necessary to get that kind of heat, not to mention that the people at ringside are walled off some 20 feet away from the ring.

In Trois-Rivières [Three Rivers], Quebec, in 1968, while I was in the ring and in the heat of a wild finish, I felt a burning sensation in my head, but I didn't know what it was. I thought somebody had thrown a stone or something. When I got to the dressing room, the boys were all pointing at my head and asking, "How did that happen?"

When I looked into the mirror, I saw a nail was sticking in my head. Somebody had come up with the idea of shooting bent nails at the bad guys with rubber bands, and I happened to be the recipient of one.

For some reason, that incident reminded me of a time when I was a young kid on the farm. It was a cold winter and I was walking back to the house with my hands in my pockets. I didn't want to take out my hands to open the door, so I thought I'd just open it with my mouth. Being young and dumb, and not thinking about anything, I tried to turn the knob with my mouth. Of course, the instant my tongue made contact with the freezing metal on the door, it stuck fast. I wasn't hesitant to pull my hands out of my pockets then. I screamed for help and had to stand there until they could pour warm water on my tongue to unfreeze it from the door.

One night, I had a knife thrown at me! I still have that knife. Luckily for me, it flipped around and the handle hit me. I bent down, picked it up, and put it into my wrestling trunks. Ten minutes later, I used the butt end of the knife on my opponent's forehead, as if I had knocked him cold, and pinned him. 1-2-3. The fans were yelling, "He used something that he took from his trunks!"

When the referee found it, I pointed at the guy who threw it at me and blamed him. "He gave it to me."

I wouldn’t be surprised if the guy who threw it at me got a beating after the matches.

I’ve had chairs and pieces of wood thrown at me. In Bayamon, Puerto Rico, they stretched a net over the area where the wrestlers walked out from the dressing room to keep things from falling on us.

In Macon, Georgia, this one particular woman would give me a hard time every week. When I walked down the aisle, she would kick me, punch me, throw stuff at me, and swing her handbag at me. She would hit me with her cane. The last time I saw her, she was using a walker to get around, but her disability did nothing to curb her temper. When I fell out of the ring during a match, she picked up her walker and slammed the feet down on my leg. That’s how intense people were when they got into a match.

In Orlando, Florida, in the early ‘80s, we had to fight the fans on the way back to the dressing room, and a few times, on the way to the ring. I would get into fist fights with them! Don’t let anybody tell you that we were fearless. I was scared!

During my time with Crockett Promotions, I ran every day and did calisthenics, slimming down to 205 pounds. In the winter of 1984, Jim Crockett came up to me and said, "Ivan, we need to add something to your gimmick. We’d like to bring somebody in as your nephew."

Road Warrior Animal piped up, "I know the ideal guy."

It was Scott Simpson, who grew up with Animal in Minneapolis. Jim Crockett took Animal’s advice and brought Scott into the territory as my nephew, Nikita Koloff.

I was impressed by Nikita from the moment I met him in the wrestling office. He was educated and he was a good businessman. The one downside was that he had never been trained to wrestle. That was the job I was given.

I really wasn’t given any time to train him. I was told, "We want to do something with him as quickly as possible. Just teach him whatever he needs to know to beat guys on television."

I didn’t have a training facility, so part of Nikita’s training took place in the dressing room. "This is a headlock." The other part took place in the car, as we drove to and from the towns. I talked to him about the psychology of being a heel.

Normally, it takes years and years of struggling on the wrestling circuits to become a polished worker. I struggled for six years before I was noticed and was given a break.

To hide his inexperience, Nikita was put in short matches. His first match was going to be a simple squash—a couple of quick moves followed by a bearhug. After giving Nikita his directions for that match, Crockett said, "Have you got it?"

Nikita repeated his instructions perfectly.

As we left for the ring, Crockett said, "If you slip and fall, the whole deal is off!"

What Crockett was saying was, if the match didn’t come off as planned, or if Nikita screwed up and didn’t get over, the plans for his push would be cancelled. Crockett was letting us know up front that we needed to make a good first impression, or it would be our last.

Everybody knows the history of Nikita’s success. His debut match on June 6, 1984, on Raleigh television, was unarguably a victory.

Nikita’s finishing move was a clothesline. When he hit somebody with a clothesline, he hit them! There wasn’t anything fake about it. Nikita’s stiff clothesline became the talk of the dressing room. When Nikita and I would attack the babyface wrestlers, the other babyfaces would hit the ring to make the save. However, instead of going after Nikita, they all ran over to me—the older, more vulnerable wrestler. They didn’t want to run to Nikita because Nikita would kill them.

Nikita was a smart, educated, man, and he learned quickly, but it took a lot of matches. No matter how fast you pick things up, there is a certain amount of experience you need to have before you really begin to grasp the concepts of working and psychology. However, considering the role that Nikita was injected into, he had to produce right from the start, and even though he was green to the business, he did a fantastic job.

I helped Nikita get over, but he was over so strong that, for a time, I felt like I was riding on his coat tails. In retrospect, though, I think we helped each other. I took special pride in taking Nikita from scratch—even though he was a great athlete and an intelligent man—and helping turn him into a great talent. In turn, being aligned with another Koloff, especially one with the talent and charisma that Nikita had, gave me a longevity that I might not have had otherwise.

As time went by, I saw Nikita as a credible worker who would continue to carry the Koloff name when I retired. Things didn’t turn out quite that way because he retired before I did, but his contributions give the Koloff name much more weight in the history books than it would have had. When I look back on that part of my career, I don’t think there was another person who could have been better suited for the part than Nikita was. I’m fortunate to have had him as a nephew, a tag team partner, and a friend.

Nikita wasn’t into the party lifestyle, and he hated drugs. Every time I lit up a joint, he would open his window. He didn’t resent me for it, though, because he knew about my situation. He liked and respected me because I protected him and helped him become famous in the business.

I got mad one night when Dusty told us, "Nikita needs to get pinned tonight."

I thought that was the worst thing they could do. "Just a minute," I said. "If we need to lose tonight, then pin me. Don’t beat Nikita, because down the road, it will mean more if he’s unbeaten."

I was smart enough to know that after spending twenty years in the business, I could get the job done both in the ring and on interviews, so it wouldn’t hurt me to lose. If they beat Nikita when he was still relatively

inexperienced, it would kill him. His mystique was that of a monster Russian who couldn’t be beaten. We would get a lot more mileage out of the Koloff team if we waited to beat him when he was over more.

Dusty was savvy enough to understand what I was driving at and he went along with it.

Later on, Nikita got involved in matches with Magnum TA and Dusty, and did jobs for both of them, but by that point in his career, things were different. He had established himself, and it wasn’t a big deal to be beaten by somebody at their level, but it made no sense to be beaten by a team that didn’t mean anything.

In 1986, one of the biggest names in wrestling, Magnum TA, had an automobile accident that ended his in-ring career. The accident also left Jim Crockett in need of a top babyface and Dusty in need of a tag team partner.

I’ll never forget the night of October 24, 1986, at the old Charlotte [NC] Coliseum. After I wrestled, I took a shower and changed clothes. I was still sitting in the dressing room when Dusty went out for his match against Ole Anderson and J.J. Dillon.

Normally, when Dusty went to the ring, he got a great deal of applause and cheering from the crowd. On that night, however, it was different. A few minutes after he left the dressing room, the fans erupted into a loud display of cheers and shouts like I had seldom heard. A few seconds later, somebody stepped into the dressing room and said, "Nikita went to the ring to be Dusty’s partner!"

I had no idea what was going on, but deep inside, I knew that I had been left out of whatever they were doing.

Regardless of my feelings on the subject, Nikita was the absolute best choice to fill Magnum TA’s spot. I don’t know why it is, but it’s a fact that the heels that the people hate the most usually get over the strongest when they switch to babyface. Nikita was probably "the" most hated heel in the business during that time, but when the people realized that he was offering

his help to Dusty, the hatred the people directed at him turned instantly to love and adoration.

Nikita proved himself to be a great worker.

The strangest thing about the whole scenario was the fact that nobody told me about it until it happened. To this day, I don't understand why I was left out of the loop. I didn't think it was right. I didn't say anything or show any kind of negative attitude, but it would have been nice it they had discussed it with me beforehand. Nikita didn't say anything about it, either, until after the fact. He explained that Dusty had told him that it was what they wanted him to do. I don't blame him because there was nothing he could do to change anything. Like everybody else in the dressing room that night, he was at the mercy of the office.

Dusty was the booker, so he probably had a lot to do with it, and Jim Crockett simply saw it as good business. Dusty would benefit the most by aligning himself with Nikita, not only from the standpoint of the territory, but in his individual matches. That isn't a knock on Dusty because he was doing what was right for Dusty, but the way he went about it was wrong.

I did make my feelings known when I was pushed down the ladder. When they turned Nikita, I was moved from main event down to semi-main event, a move that cost me $800 to $1,000 a week on my paycheck and left me struggling to get something else going. There wasn't much I could really do about it, so I just went out, did my match, and kept my feelings to myself.

That was the last time Nikita and I traveled together until they turned me babyface 1988.

In 1987, Nikita's wife [then girlfriend Mandy Smithson] was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease. They were married in 1988. The trauma had a dramatic effect on Nikita as far as his mental state and his work at the time. Two months after their wedding, Nikita quit wrestling to nurse and minister to her. On June 14, 1989, after six weeks in intensive care, Mandy passed away.

The loss seemed to take something out of Nikita. Other than a few programs with Lex Luger and Sting, Nikita seemed to have lost his desire to wrestle. When you lose your wife, somebody you see as your life's partner, it has to affect your personality and mental state.

In early 1990, Nikita met and married a beautiful young lady named Victoria, and three years later, he gave his heart and life to Jesus Christ and became a born-again Christian.

Nikita and I were good friends from the first day we met and we are still friends to this day. I look at him as a brother.

I had two other partners during my time with Jim Crockett Promotions in the Carolinas. In 1986, Barry Darsow was brought into the territory as my partner—Krusher Kruschev. Barry was a good worker, either by himself or as part of a team. We teamed up for almost two years and we had some great feuds against teams like the Road Warriors, and Dutch Mantel and Bobby Jaggers. Dutch and Bobby were both very good wrestlers. I had no trouble selling their bullwhip gimmick, especially after they hit me by mistake on a couple of occasions. I remember being very cautious of the bullwhips they carried.

In January 1987, when Barry's contract with Jim Crockett Promotions was about to expire, he was offered a contract to work for Vince McMahon and the WWF. Barry took me aside and said, "I don't know what to do. I don't want to hurt the team, but the offer is really good!"

I had never had a partner do that before. Usually, when they got a better offer, they just left without telling me anything. When he asked me whether he should go, I encouraged him and said, "Go where the money's at, brother. This is an opportunity that might not come your way again."

I hated to see Barry go because he was such an asset, but I understood completely. He did well for himself. He went into the WWF as Demolition Smash and later wrestled as Repo Man and Blacktop Bully.

One of the wrestling newsletters falsely reported that Barry quit because he was upset over the fact that his payoff was half of what mine was. That was

not true because I remember being upset with the amount of our payoffs, and his payoff was the same as mine.

When Barry left, Al Blake filled the void as Vladimir Petrov. Nikita had turned babyface by that time, so we feuded with him and Dusty Rhodes, as well as the Rock ‘n Roll Express. After leaving to wrestle for Bill Watts’ Universal Wrestling Federation, Al was busted for selling drugs. He retired from wrestling until 1991, when he worked for the WWF under his own name. One year later, he retired for good.

It was a privilege to have Dick Murdoch as my tag team partner during that time, as well. I remember being tagged with Dick in Florida. Dick had a brutal, knockout punch, much like that one that Swede Hanson was famous for having. One night, Dick laid out a couple of spectators when a riot broke out. After witnessing that, I always stayed close behind him. Not only was Dick a good man to have in your corner of the ring, but he was an asset outside the ring, as well.

When we were touring with Jim Crockett Promotions, we went to Waxahachie, Texas, Dick’s hometown. Dick invited the boys out to his home. Later that night, I found out that I was wrestling Dick. Prior to that time, Dick and I had always been heels, so I was surprised at how experienced he was doing babyface moves. He not only drop kicked me, but he gave me a flying head scissors. It surprised me because I wasn’t used to seeing him do those moves.

Dick was driving a rental car after a show in St. Louis. It was Dick, Terry Funk, and another passenger, possibly Harley Race. Dick decided to show off when he did a "wheelie" in a small downtown park. I remember looking around to see if there were any police nearby because I knew we would be going to the jail.

During my time working for the Crocketts, I bought a brand, new Chevrolet Caprice. One of the boys was getting married, so I drove it over to the wedding reception. I had been drinking before I left home and I drank more at the reception. I knew I was drunk, so I gave my keys to one of the boys, with the idea that he would drive me home. By the time I was ready to go

home—about four o’clock in the morning—I took my keys back and went outside to drive myself home.

I woke up the next morning to find twenty-four stitches in my head. When I asked what had happened, I was told that I had totaled out my new car. Apparently, after I left the party, I wrapped my new car around a telephone pole, and I wasn’t wearing a seat belt. That should have been a lesson to me, but it didn’t stop me from drinking.

At my sentencing, the judge looked at me and said, "You’re an alcoholic and you need professional help."

I didn’t believe him. I was convinced that I didn’t have a problem with alcohol. The only problem I thought I could possibly have was not keeping enough of a supply handy.

The judge sent me to Alcoholics Anonymous [AA] meetings, which is where I first came to the realization that I really was an alcoholic. The one thing I can remember about the meetings was coming to the realization that I really was an alcoholic. I had all the symptoms of being an alcoholic—blacking out, denying that I had a problem, forgetting what happened during drinking episodes. And yet, when it came to admitting that I had a problem, I was in denial. I refused to admit that I had a problem.

I had a lot of mishaps that can be traced directly to my abuse of alcohol, but that was the worst and only accident that I was involved in. I woke up to find myself and my car in a ditch several times, and other than the one time that I mentioned above, I never got hurt or demolished my car in the process.

I pulled myself up onto Ric Flair’s inversion table one day, draped my legs over it, and dropped down backwards. When I did, a small pouch of marijuana fell out of my pocket. J.J. Dillon was working in the office as the booker at the time and I was afraid that it would get back to the office. I thought, "Oh, no! J.J. might see it!"

Like nobody knew that I was doing marijuana.

"What? Ivan’s doing marijuana? I’m shocked! I had no idea."

When the Crocketts changed the name of their company from the National Wrestling Alliance to World Championship Wrestling, there was a big change in the way they ran the company. The first big change they made was to ask everybody to fly out of Atlanta. I was living in Charlotte, so I wasn’t too happy with that arrangement. I had moved enough times and I wanted to keep my family settled.

During my last few months with the company, Dusty Rhodes came up with the idea of Paul Jones double-crossing me, so I turned babyface and once again teamed up with Nikita. I didn’t like the ideas they had for my program, so I bowed out. One of the problems was that, with all of my accumulated injuries, I couldn’t do a lot of the moves that the people expected a babyface to do. I was experienced enough that I might have pulled it off, but I just didn’t feel comfortable as a babyface. For the short time I did it, the people were accepting me as a good guy, but I felt awkward responding to the people when it came to shaking hands and talking. I suppose that I had been a heel for so long that it felt uncomfortable to do anything else.

In 1981, when I worked a program with the Iron Sheik, the fans had to pick sides. We were both heels, so the fans were torn as to who they should cheer for. Maybe they didn’t care for either one of us and wanted to see us destroy each other, but he proved to be a bigger heel than I was. He got the majority of the boos and catcalls.

In 1988, when Jimmy Crockett brought in George Scott to replace Dusty as the booker, I asked him if he had any plans for me. "Maybe six months down the road," he answered.

I knew exactly what George meant by that statement. It was his way of giving me my notice. I suppose that was better than the standard two weeks that we used to get, but George was like a lot of promoters. They never had the guts to come right out and tell you the truth to your face.

By the end of 1988, I had taken enough. I saw the handwriting on the wall. You can only insult a guy so much before he takes the hint. If the booker

isn’t doing anything with you and doesn’t have any long-range plans for you, it doesn’t make a lot of sense to hang around. If you’re doing jobs on top, that’s one thing. It’s not too bad doing jobs on the semi-finals, either, but when they ask you to do jobs underneath, then it’s time to leave.

There I was, a big-time professional wrestler, making a few hundred dollars a week. I was barely making enough money to cover my expenses, which were considerable. Since the company had adopted the new policy of having the talent fly out of Atlanta, I had to stay there for three or four nights each week, which meant having a place of residence in both Atlanta and Charlotte.

There is more money available today because of pay-per-view shows, but in my day, the only people with guaranteed contracts were the world champions. They could make 2% to 4% of the house.

In my day, I was one of the fortunate people, but when I hear about what some of the boys were making back then, I think I got cheated! I must have had the wool pulled over my eyes. Some of the people writing books today talk about making $200,000 back in the ‘70s. If anyone was making that kind of money, it would be the NWA or the AWA world champion. I know for a fact that the WWWF wasn’t paying that for their champion in the ‘70s.

I wasn’t making that kind of money. I made good money when I won the belt in New York, but I never even got close to $200,000. In fact, I never made more than $150,000 in one year, and on the average, from 1968 to 1988, I averaged $75,000 a year. I had four good years when I was making a low six-figure income, but I had more five-figure income years than I did six.

Over a 30-year period, even if a wrestler earned $80,000 to $90,000 a year, and invested wisely, he would be lucky today to be set for life. We had to pay for our car, gasoline, a home, a motel room in whatever town we stayed over, an apartment or motel if we were only living temporarily in the territory where we wrestled, meals on the road, and regular expenses for our family. We couldn’t even begin to think about a medical plan, and the only place we could get disability insurance was Lloyd’s of London, but who could afford that?

Most of the guys didn’t come close to making even $50,000 a year. They lived a pauper’s life—really conservative. Some of the guys had to get part-time jobs just to break even. As a rule, we made enough to live and pay our expenses, but there was never enough to get ahead. I was fortunate enough to save my money and put some of it aside. Not a lot, but I was frugal.

I diversified in different areas, but I kept a lot of cash. When times were good, we bought a house and new cars, but we had to be careful, because we never knew what the next territory would offer. Our income could drop from $2,000 a week to $500. When that happened, we would have to dip into our savings. In times like that, it didn’t take long before we depleted our entire savings account. We relied on luck and a prayer that we had a good year.

At times, I believe I was getting a fair shake, but at other times, I wasn’t. I always felt that promoters take the biggest risk, so they should make the biggest profit. However, their risk was completely financial, an intangible. The boys jeopardized their bodies, a tangible. From that standpoint, the boys didn’t get paid what they deserved, especially the guys on the lower end of the pay scale.

If you were able to invest in land, like I did, and were successful enough to turn it around at the right time, you might have enough money to fund your retirement, but if you didn’t, there was nothing else to fall back on. It was a high risk business with little upside. One day you’re involved, and the next, you’re out of a job. When that happened, a lot of wrestlers went back to their old trade, or to work for a trucking company or something.

I try to be positive, but in my opinion, it was wrong of promoters to have wrestlers abuse their bodies and puppeteer the talent, and when the time comes, instead of having enough respect for the people who made you money by saying, "I appreciate your efforts, but we have to let you go," they starve you and give you airplane tickets that leave from a city where you don’t live.

One night, I went home and I never went back. I didn’t call to tell them I was going home. I just left. I suppose you could say that I was bitter. I had made the promoters a lot of money in programs with Nikita, the Road

Warriors, Rock ‘n’ Roll Express, and Jimmy Valiant. I was paid for my efforts, but I don’t think it’s fair to be pushed aside so quickly, like you’re old meat. That’s the way it is in the corporate world, though, and that’s where wrestling had moved.

I went home to Charlotte and I never looked back. In hindsight, it was a good move because I did a lot of freelancing with the independent promotions, and I didn’t have the expenses of being away from home and living on the road.

Chapter 16
The Long Walk

After leaving Jim Crockett in July 1989, I got the word out that I was available for work. I didn't get a lot of matches, but I did get booked on weekends on a fairly regular basis. Eventually, I went to the Philippines, Japan, Puerto Rico, and the West Indies. My friend Carlos Colon, the promoter in Puerto Rico, contacted me and brought me down for a short tour. Carlos and I met each other in 1968 when we were both working in Montreal, during which time I had wrestled both Carlos and his partner, Pete Sanchez.

A few years later, when Carlos opened his own promotion in Puerto Rico, he brought Johnny Rougeau and me into his territory to wrestle each other. We stayed in Puerto Rico for four days, which was wonderful because it was January. During that time of the year, Montreal was covered in snow, and snow drifts were piled high along the sides of the highways. Puerto Rico was like a paradise.

Unfortunately, I made a big mistake by staying out in the sun for too long. In Montreal during the winter, you don't see the sun very often, so I was as white as a sheet. When I didn't suffer any ill-effects from the sun after spending an hour on the beach the first day, I assumed I could handle any amount of sun. On the second day, I stayed out for four hours … and I got terribly burned. I had second and third degree burns on my shoulders, my back, and the top of my head.

I had to wrestle Johnny Rougeau that night on an outdoor show. I ran to the ring and did my old Montreal gimmick where I ran around and around the ring. Unfortunately, the ground was wet from a thunderstorm that had taken place earlier that day. As I was making my fifth lap around the ring, I slipped and took a big bump into the mud. I slid along the ground for several yards and got absolutely filthy. As most people will do in a situation

like that, I stood right up, jumped into the ring, and acted as if nothing had happened. Johnny Rougeau, of course, was cracking up with laughter.

I suffered terribly from the burns for the next couple of days. One night, I had to wrestle Jacques Rougeau. For the finish, I hoisted Jacques up onto my shoulders for an inverted backbreaker and began walking around the ring. As Jacques shifted around on my shoulders, the skin peeled right off. The people had to believe what was happening. My shoulders were bleeding and oozing puss, and I was experiencing the most excruciating pain that I have ever experienced in my life.

The next day, I went to the hospital, but the only advice they could give me was to put ice on it to keep the temperature down. I suffered a lot for the next few days until I was able to get it under control.

The time I spent in Puerto Rico was more like a vacation than anything else. I enjoyed the beaches, the good weather, and wrestling with my friends. I would stay for a week or two at a time and Carlos would fly me in and out of the territory. Except for the main show in Bayamon, it was an easy schedule because most of Carlos' shows were spot shows. In addition to that, the island was only 100 miles long by 50 miles wide, so the trips were short. I worked a lot against the Invader and won the Puerto Rican title.

From 1989 until 1994, Paul Jones and I were partners in a wrestling school. We bought a ring and rented a gym in Indian Trail, North Carolina. That building didn't work out because there was barely enough room for the ring. The owner wasn't happy because the guys kept putting their elbows through the wall. Paul knew someone who owned a bigger building, more like a warehouse, so we rented it and put in two rings.

The income from the school not only helped supplement my income, but it kept me busy. I also stayed busy for the first few years wrestling on the independent circuit, primarily around the Charlotte area for Atlantic Coast Wrestling. Mike Lambuth was the first owner of Atlantic Coast Wrestling. He brought in Paul Jones to help book, and later, George Scott. They drew houses that occasionally equaled the average attendance of what the NWA had been doing at the time.

I wrestled Vince Torelli while I was there. Vince became more well-known in later years as Ken Shamrock. George Scott also brought in Wahoo McDaniel and Vladimir Koloff. Vladimir, billed as yet another relative of the Koloffs, was Carl Brantley. We teamed together in the ACW, and later with South Atlantic Pro Wrestling and the IWA, feuding with Joel Deaton and Gene Ligon, a masked team known as the Thunderfoots.

Bobby Fulton was the person who suggested I give the name Vladimir Koloff to Carl. Carl was an amateur wrestler from North Wilkesboro who wrestled in competitions throughout the world. One day, I was showing him how to do combination moves, like snatching a headlock after reversing an arm, or a side suplex from a headlock.

Carl picked me up one day to drop me in a side suplex, but he did it the Greco-Roman way, instead of laying me down flat, the professional way, to make sure my shoulders and back hit the mat at the same time. He just dumped me backwards, causing me to land on the back of my head. I was smaller than Carl, but I jumped up and went after him. I let him know in no uncertain terms that I wasn't happy. I wasn't really all that angry, but I wanted him to know that he should always protect his opponent. After that incident, of course, he turned out great.

While I'm on the subject of being short, I was one of the shorter guys in the business, but the magazines portrayed me as being a huge monster. The heels in my wrestling boots were about an inch high, but I didn't wear lifts. You can't get heels too high because you lose the support on the ankle, making it easy to possibly twist the ankle. I was never conscience about being small, but I was humbled when I'd get into the ring with a big guy like Blackjack Mulligan, who was a foot taller than me.

Surprisingly enough, I was commanding more money on the independent circuit than I was making during my final days with WCW. The money I made on the indies was still a far cry from the thousands of dollars a week that I was making during the time when Nikita and I were feuding with the Road Warriors, but it allowed me to live comfortably.

The pay I was making with Atlantic Coast Wrestling was less than what I made with other independent groups, so I had an understanding with

George Scott. If another group offered me a better payday, then I was free to take it. There were a few misunderstandings and conflicts between us, but for the most part, things worked out well.

I believe Paul Jones took over the Atlantic Coast promotion for awhile, with help from Frank Dusek, and Mitch Goude was the last person to run the operation.

Paul didn't stay around too long. Running a wrestling school wasn't something that he really wanted to do, so he backed out. When he left, Bobby Fulton came in to help. Bobby's younger brother, Jackie, was a big help to me, too.

Bobby was a great teacher, but we had differing opinions on the method of teaching. I wanted the students to work hard, and I pushed them, but I wanted to be patient and bring them along at their own pace. Bobby wanted to train the students in what I called the "army method," which was the old-school style of training—yell, ridicule, and demean. I'm not saying that Bobby was wrong in taking that approach. He was very successful using that method, as wrestlers had been for decades, but I wanted the students to be able to make mistakes without having a fear of being embarrassed. Maybe I was wrong, but I wanted to capitalize on those mistakes by using them to teach the proper way of doing things.

Even in the old days, when I was wrestling full time, new guys came into the business who didn't understand what their job was, even to the point where I had to physically control them in the ring. I remembered being there myself—green and nervous—so I'd say, "Relax, kid." Then I'd give them a clue as to what I wanted. I would teach them. So many of the guys did that for me, and I wanted to give the new guys the same opportunity.

Regardless, Bobby was a great asset to the school because he knew wrestling. When we first got together, Bobby and I agreed that if we went our separate ways, we would split the equipment. Bobby owned an old, wooden ring that he probably still has today. I bought the rings I was using from a guy in Atlanta, Georgia, named Lincoln. Strangely enough, he looked like Abraham Lincoln, so that's what I called him. When Bobby left, he took his ring with him.

I continued to teach with the assistance of Sean Powers, one of my students. Sean was educated, a great athlete, soft-spoken, and good with the students. I liked that. Sean really excelled as far as demonstrating the moves and holds. My injuries had really curtailed my physical abilities, so he was a big help. I couldn't have continued without Sean's help because he was good at what he did and he could relate to the students. Sean and I wrestled a few tag team matches together and held the AWA/CWF Mid-Atlantic tag team title in February 2005. Sean is now wrestling as Solomon Spade on the independent circuit and he had a tryout match with WWE.

The toughest challenge I faced was cutting out drugs. I was still drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana, but I wasn't able to make enough money to afford harder drugs like cocaine. Looking back on it now, getting my walking papers from WCW was a blessing in disguise. At the time, though, I didn't see things that way.

In 1989, I tried to quit drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. One night, I threw my beer, tobacco, and marijuana out of the car window, but after driving a few blocks away, I turned the car around, got out, and searched in the bushes for them. That's how desperate I was.

I tried to find other ways of making an income, like selling nuts and bolts to companies. I struggled with the business for ten months, but I wasn't a good salesman, even though people would place orders because they felt sorry for me. One day, I got a $1,000 order. I was so excited! My commission, however, was 10% … $100.

Nikita and I worked together in a network marketing company. That was one of those things where you start your own business, and by involving other people, you get a percentage of their sales of specific products. I first showed the network marketing principle to Nikita when I introduced him to Amway. He was impressed by it, but he never signed up.

We did get into other companies together. I marveled at how good Nikita and his wife, Victoria, were at building a network of people. They did very well at it and taught me a lot, even though I got into the company before they did. Things didn't always work out and we went from one marketing company to another. Some failed and other weren't sellable like we thought

they were at the beginning. Nikita allowed me to sell a product called Tri-Chromoline from Achievers Unlimited in his gym. We were also in a business called "Super Highway" in the early ‘90s. I received a check for $3,000.00 from that company. After we tried working with Prepaid Legal Services [for only a couple of months], I realized that I wasn’t really cut out for network marketing.

In 1994, I wrestled Wahoo McDaniel in High Point, North Carolina, in a match billed as "Loser Retires from Wrestling." That was planned to be my last official match.

Since then, I have come back a few times in legends matches, or matches for charity.

In September 1994, Nikita called me and said, "I need to talk to you, Uncle."

Nikita always called me uncle, or Uncle Ivan. When the guys heard Nikita call me Uncle Ivan, it got over big, and a lot of the guys started to call me that.

From the excited tone of his voice, I thought he was calling me about another network marketing business, or to tell me that he had won the lottery or something. "What kind of business do you want me to get into now?" I asked.

"Oh, no," he said. "It’s not about money. I went to church yesterday and I need to tell you about what I experienced. I’m born again!"

As I explained earlier, my Mom made us go to church almost every week when we were kids. I remember learning Catechism and about God, but the concept of accepting Jesus Christ as my Savior had never been explained to me. The mass was in Latin, so I didn’t really understand what was being said. As Catholics, we went to church, we went to confession, and that was it.

I do remember feeling good about going to church when I was a kid. It made me feel good to put my hand in the holy water, go down on one knee,

and make the sign of the cross, before I went to sit down in the pew. I remember lighting candles and putting money into the offering. The thing I remember the most about church was the heat in the summer. The church was so hot that people would pass out, even us kids. We would be taken out under the big tree until we came to and could go back in.

Looking back on it, I love and respect my parents for wanting to give us that foundation of God, even though I didn't accept it until late in life.

Nikita wasn't the first person to talk to me about being a born-again Christian. He was just the first to get my attention. When I approached Tully Blanchard one time about getting into a network marketing business, he shared with me that he wasn't interested because he had just made a new commitment to the Lord. He explained the importance of being a born-again Christian, and how his life had changed for the better because of it. He just wasn't interested in the material part of life as far as getting into a business at that time. He told me that if there was something he needed, he would definitely order it from me. He didn't push me to attend church or anything, but he did plant a seed in my mind.

When I talked to Nikita, he explained salvation as if it was an angle in the wrestling match of life, only it wasn't a work. It was a shoot. I was torn and somewhat skeptical, but I could see and hear the change that had come over Nikita. When he told me about what Christ had done for him in his own life, and how happy he was, I was convinced that what he had experienced was real.

When Nikita asked me to join him at church that night, I said, "Okay, Niki. I'll be there."

The Lord must have had a hand in the day's events because I was doing an autograph session earlier that day, and the service was at the Assembly of God Church in Kannapolis [NC], which I had to pass on my way home. When I walked into the church, I was shocked. There must have been 3,000 people there. I wasn't dressed for church, and I didn't see Nikita, so I sat down in the back and tried to blend in with the carpet.

The preacher that night was Terrance Rose, an evangelist from England. At one time, Brother Rose had been involved with gangsters, but he turned his life around when he found the Lord. I've seen him one other time since that night and I was equally impressed by how anointed he is. He touches a lot of lives for the Lord all over the world.

His sermon really touched me. In fact, it seemed as if he was talking directly to me. One of the things he talked about was the Ten Commandments. I might have lived by four or five of the Commandments, but there were quite a few that I broke on a daily basis. The pastor said we should live by all of them. The point that struck me the hardest, however, was the fact that I was a sinner.

When the preacher opened the altar to everyone who wanted to accept Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior, I was among the first dozen sinners to make my way to the front. I was sitting all the way in the back of the church, so that trip down the aisle seemed to be the longest walk of my life. The people in the pews all had their heads bowed in prayer, but I felt so conspicuous, as if every eye in the church was watching me as I made my way to the altar.

My mind goes back to the night at Jack Wentworth's gym in Hamilton, when I jumped into the ring to attack Sailor Clark and Al Bell. I acted on impulse when I was overcome with the idea of wanting to help the good guy who was in trouble. My action at the church that night was along those lines, in the sense that a higher power had taken control of my body and was moving me to the front of the church. I wasn't aware of it at the time, but I know now that my heart was making my feet move.

The thing I remember the most about that walk was thinking, "This is the drug I need." I don't know why I thought of my salvation in those terms, but a new life in Jesus Christ is exactly what I needed to help me overcome my addictions. I knew something was happening to me that was more than human. It was spiritual.

As we stood at the altar at the front of the church, the preacher laid his hands on us and prayed with each one of us individually. When he came to me, he said, "Ivan, may I pray with you?"

I thought, "How does he know my name?"

It was then that I realized that Nikita was standing behind him.

I couldn’t imagine how Jesus could save someone like me, an all-around, bad person, so the prayer I prayed that night came from the deepest, darkest, recesses of my heart.

Long before I went to the church, I knew that my whole life was in need of an overhaul. My life was a wreck. I was a bad husband. I was on drugs, and because I was on drugs, I disciplined my kids with a weightlifting belt. I had fought with people on airplanes, 30,000 feet up in the air, and the guy I fought was a silver medal winner in the Olympics! I was crazed that night, like a demon. He had to bite me on the neck just to contain me.

I needed something to give my life meaning and peace. I found that "something" that night.

As I prayed the sinner’s prayer, God touched me and I felt myself thrown backwards. Whenever we fall or get knocked down in wrestling, we were always taught to get back to our feet quickly because there may be an elbow or kneedrop coming. Nikita caught me as I started to jump up, hugged me, and said, "Relax, Uncle. What you’re feeling is the Holy Spirit. Isn’t it great?"

It did feel great. I remember a warm feeling coursing through my body. I was excited because it was the first time in my life that I really knew that God was real.

In the weeks to come, I learned that my experience didn’t automatically turn me into a good person. That’s not how God works in our lives. The Bible tells us that we will struggle against the world and sin for the rest of our lives.

A church member counseled me that night and told me that I needed to find a church home, get involved in the ministry of the church, and study the Bible.

Just as Nikita directed, I would read from the Bible each night, but it just didn’t make any sense to me. Even so, I continued to read, hoping that God would help me understand.

I also prayed, but I really didn’t know how to pray. As Catholics, we were taught to recite "Our Father" and "Hail Mary." Niki told me, "Pray to God just as if you were talking to your earthly father. He’s that close. He’s in you. He’s everything to you. He loves you so much that he died for you. Just share your heart with God."

At first, I didn’t understand what he was talking about, but when I realized that I could have a personal relationship with the Lord, I was able to release all the emotion that was bottled up inside me that I had been trying to release through the use of drugs and alcohol. I began to pray from my heart that God would take away my desire for drugs, chewing tobacco, marijuana, and alcohol.

Even after I accepted the Lord, I struggled for several years before I was able to kick my addictions. The first thing that went was the marijuana. I never would have thought that it would have been as easy as it was. Within a few years, I was able to give up alcohol. Every time I took a drink, I was convicted by the Holy Spirit. I would set it aside and swear that I would never touch it again, but after a period of time, I would backslide and begin drinking again. Each time I returned to drink, though, it upset my stomach. I began to realize that God didn’t want me to drink. I fight the same battle when I eat. After I eat too much, I wonder, "What am I doing?"

After I became a Christian, I went to one of the AA meetings. I stood up and said my name. Several people had recognized me before I said who I was. I said, "I’m an alcoholic and a drug abuser, but I’ve reached a turning point in my life where I’ve finally been able to give it up. I can’t claim any of the credit because I tried many times in the past, and always failed, but through the Word of God and prayer, I was able to gain the power I needed to succeed."

I went to the meeting to own up to the fact that I had problems with alcoholism, and testify that I couldn’t have cleaned myself up through my own efforts or willpower. I don’t know how successful I was in getting my

message across to the others. One guy at the meeting said, "We’re supposed to keep God out of this."

I said, "Well, I was asked to say what I thought, and I’m saying what I think, so you can take it or leave it."

When I left the meeting, I felt good inside because I had stood up for my convictions and given the credit for my success to the Lord. It wasn’t something I "thought" might be true. It’s something that I knew in my heart was, and is true.

Drinking becomes a thought, a mental acceptance, but it’s really not a good choice to make. To this day, I don’t have any inclination to drink alcohol or take drugs. A few times since I became a Christian, when I attempted to celebrate with a glass of wine, it upset my stomach badly. I believe that was the Lord’s way of reminding me that I should stay away from alcohol altogether. It was only through His power that I’ve been able to overcome the addiction and desires that ruled my life for more than 30 years. God’s Word tells us that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" and "By His stripes, I am healed." God took my desire to drink alcohol away completely and I have NEVER been tempted to return to my former lifestyle. NEVER!

The main thing that I’ve learned through my experience is that Christians aren’t perfect, but we are SAVED.

Chapter 17
Blind, But Now, I See

To illustrate what a difference that God has made in my life, I'd like to share two incidents that happened to me.

The first took place on an afternoon in 1983 when I was driving in the New York area. As I was approaching a toll booth, a Hertz rental truck cut me off. I had some choice words for him and revenge entered my plans. As we left the toll booth, I sped up and passed him on the right, cutting him off. Unfortunately, I didn't judge the distance well and my bumper caught his. I thought my bumper had been ripped off, and perhaps his, as well, so I stepped on the accelerator, figuring that I had better get out of there before I was reported. I drove about five miles and took the first exit I reached.

When I got out of the car to assess the damage, I saw three feet of my back bumper sticking out at a 90-degree angle. I knew a few things about body work, so I fixed it myself right there on the spot. I backed up my car to a tree and forced the bumper back into place.

My hasty actions eventually cost me the price of a new bumper, but I was fortunate that nobody was hurt or killed due to my hasty actions.

About six months ago, I was making a right turn from a subdivision. As I pulled out, I didn't notice a motorcycle speeding towards me. Luckily, he was far enough away that he was able to slow down to about 40 mph and avoid ramming into the rear end of my car. He zipped around me as we picked up speed, then cut back in front of me and slowed down to 10 mph.

My wife, Renae, was with me. We couldn't believe how crazy the guy was acting. He held steady at that same speed for over a mile. When I finally saw an opportunity to pass him, I did, thinking that would be the end of it. For some reason, that seemed to make him even more angry. He passed me again and gave me the one-finger salute. I suppose he was trying to say that

he was number one. When he passed me, he swerved back into the right lane, then zig-zagged back and forth to keep me from passing. I kept a cool head, but I asked Renae to write down his license plate number so I could call the police and report him. By then, there were two or three other cars behind us, so I think he thought it might be best to call an end to his shenanigans and move on. He made a left turn and went his own way.

If the old Ivan Koloff had been driving, I probably would have reacted like I did in 1983 and ran him into a ditch. Fortunately for me (and the motorcyclist, even though he doesn't know it), I'm now serving the real Master now. I'm getting back a little bit of what I dished out in my wild days. It's like the old saying: "What goes around, comes around." Even better, as the bible says, "He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail." (Proverbs 22:8)

Today I am happy, content, and excited about my life. I'm thankful for the direction that the Lord has taken me. I've never been one to sit around and it gives me something to do in my retirement. I look forward to new opportunities that stimulate me to learn and get closer to Him. Since I was saved in September 1994, my calling is to share the Word of God with others. I go wherever the Lord leads me. Now, instead of shouting at my wrestling opponents and telling them what I will do TO them, I brag about the Lord and what He can do FOR anybody who accepts Him.

I am honored when I am invited to share my testimony at various churches. I am especially thrilled, beyond words, when I witness the souls being saved. I love sharing my story of how God has taken the bad in my life and turned it into good for His glory.

When I left WCW, I toured children's hospitals where terminally ill children live. Many of them knew who I was, but because of their condition, they couldn't talk. That really touched my heart. What do you say in a case like that? How do you comfort them?

There are so many troubled kids in the world today. I enjoy visiting with them in church youth groups, juvenile detention homes, and jails. I tell them my life story in the hopes that it will help them avoid the mistakes that I made. My experiences allow me to say, "I've been there and done that," and

"Do as I say, not as I did." Many of them know who I am, so I have some credibility with them. They're amazed that I was in so much trouble as a youngster. I think our youth look up to celebrities. For some reason, they think they live lives of chastity and morality. In most cases, however, that is not the case. Celebrities [and I'm a good example] face the same problems and temptations that the rest of the world does.

On weekends, I sign autographs and promote the Children's Miracle Network at retailers like Wal-Mart, K-Mart, Sam's Club, and Food Lion.

Years before I became a Christian, after I left WCW, I worked on a few independent shows with Vladimir Koloff and Wahoo McDaniel. The promoter wanted them to do some autograph signings to help publicize the show. They mentioned it to me and I thought, "That's a good idea."

After that first time, whenever I was booked on a spot show, Vladimir and I would do signings together to help promote the show. Even after I quit wrestling, I thought it was something I could do to help keep myself active. Even though I'm getting older, I can't bring myself to just sit around and do nothing. I was raised to work hard.

On weekends, even when I'm booked on a wrestling show, I work for Children's Miracle Network, a non-profit organization that helps raise funds to raise funds for children's hospitals across America. They treat and help more than 17 million children each year. The 170 Children's Miracle Network hospitals have helped kids overcome everything from asthma and broken bones to cancer, heart defects, pediatric AIDS, muscular dystrophy and serious injuries. They also help fund research, education, and outreach programs that keep millions of kids out of the hospital each year.

I call store managers and ask if they would be interested in having me donate my time to promote Children's Miracle Network in their store. I get a very positive response from most of the stores, but the decision is left up to the local manager. People donate money through the stores and they get the credit.

One of the great joys of my life is when I have many people come up to me and say that their child is alive today because of Children's Miracle

Network. Thanks to the cooperation of the retailers, we're able to do a lot of good with Children's Miracle. It's a great organization. I only wish I could do more for them.

Renae and I have met so many people over the last 15 years while doing autographs at Wal-Mart stores. Some of them have never left our minds and prayers. One day, a blind man walked into the store with his guide dog. He said, "Ivan, do you remember me?"

I honestly couldn't remember ever having seen or met him. He said, "I met you a few years ago. At that time, I was riding with a motorcycle gang and I was pretty wild." [This is no reflection on my motorcycle buddies] He proceeded to tell me that during an argument one day, a man shot him in the face, and he was instantly blinded. Then he said, "Looking back on it now, that was really the best thing that could have happened to me because it changed my way of thinking. I thought I had lost everything, so I turned in the only direction I could … to Jesus Christ. I came to realize that other than my sight, I hadn't lost anything. The Lord has come to mean everything to me, and He's all I really need."

Since then, he married a wonderful lady and they had a child. He said, "I could have been killed that day and slipped into Hell, but God kept me here for a reason."

He was happier than he had ever been in his life. We will always remember his great testimony!

We will also remember a very sad story. A woman who had lost her only child only three weeks before came up to the table. Her 18-year-old daughter had been kidnapped, raped, and murdered.

As she explained that they had no suspects in the crime, we could feel the pain in her voice. To make matters worse, her doctors had diagnosed her with colon cancer. She had no one to depend on for help and she was looking for comfort and prayer.

We then prayed for her that day. Before we parted, she told us that she had faith in the Lord. Our biggest regret is that we failed to get her name and

phone number so that we could keep in touch with her to encourage her.

Another man told us that he was very mad at God. He had driven in hundreds of demolition derbies and had many accidents, and yet, he had never been injured … until one day when he was involved in a collision that caused multiple injuries. Even though he became crippled, he never lost his faith in God.

A year later, he and his wife were in an automobile accident when somebody ran a stop sign, hitting the passenger side of the car. His wife was killed. He kept asking us, over and over, "Why did God take my wife?"

I answered him. "God did not take your wife's life. The person who caused the accident did that."

There's no easy answer to a question like that. He couldn't accept it and seemed to be very angry. When he started to leave, I simply encouraged him to "just ask for forgiveness and have faith that God will restore you."

We closed by telling him that we would keep him in our prayers, and we do.

When I'm not working for Children's Miracle Network, I do appearances at charity functions and wrestling fan conventions. I wear my "Witnessing Christ" shirt and I talk to people about Him. It touches a lot of people. People ask for my business card and pass them on to friends, so the message gets out by word of mouth. I also sell T-shirts and a book called Wrestling With God, which features stories on Nikita, Sting, Tully Blanchard, George South, and Ted DiBiase.

I don't get to see many of my wrestling friends because we all live so far apart, so I'm happy that I've been invited to participate in the wrestling fan conventions that have taken place around the country. It not only gives me an opportunity to visit with my fans, but it gives me a chance to reunite with other wrestlers. I even wrestled Dominic Denucci in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, on August 27, 2005. The first time I wrestled Dominic was in Nanaimo, British Columbia, on October 1, 1966. I was still working as Red McNulty. Ivan Koloff hadn't even been thought of at the time.

In 1994, I appeared at an autograph signing for the Pro Wrestling Hall of Fame in New York. Bruno Sammartino, Lou Albano, and Jimmy Valiant were all there. People ask me why I haven't been inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame. It's simple. I never got an invitation.

I'm not knocking Vince McMahon's method of doing business, but wrestling has changed so much in the past twenty years. For one thing, there's no more suspense. Everybody knows that the matches are all pre-determined. Years ago, people thought we were trying to tear each others heads off.

I would like to see Vince use his influence to spread some messages to our youth. "Don't use drugs. Stay away from alcohol." Why not offer a family-oriented show, instead of having everything based on soap operas with sex, adultery, and practically-naked women?

Vince knows that Bruno and I feel strongly about that, and that's one of the reasons why he won't honor us in his Hall of Fame. He's only hurting himself because the fans feel that if Bruno isn't inducted, then it's not really a Hall of Fame. Whether Vince likes him or not, Bruno was the backbone of the WWWF for many years. He was a big draw and headlined many sellout shows.

Bruno is very well-off financially, so he doesn't have to do anything he considers below him, but he told me that if Vince would give him a spot to talk about the ramifications of steroids, then he would appear at his Hall of Fame.

I also enjoy working on the independent circuit because I get to see old friends like Jimmy Valiant and Abdullah the Butcher. Once in a while, I see Don Kernodle. I always look forward to seeing Don. He always gave the wrestling fans an entertaining match. He was a workhorse in the ring who always went above and beyond the call of duty. To me, personally, he was an asset. I can't say enough good things about him. I'm proud to call him my friend.

I saw Abdullah the Butcher recently and he reminded me of something that happened in Chicoutimi, Quebec. One night, my match was scheduled after

Abdullah’s. Abby was walking down the hallway as I left the dressing room. He was a scary-looking guy, but it was made worse that night because he had blood all over his face. In the hallway, there was a big, mechanical ice-scraper sitting in front of a side hallway leading to the dressing room, placed there to prevent fans from going in. An 8-year-old girl took a wrong turn on her way from the restroom and came face to face with Abby. She was faced with a 300-pound, bloody, angry-looking Abdullah the Butcher ... and she had no place to go. Abby didn’t do anything to her, but of course, he remained in character. Her reaction was to panic and start screaming.

When I came out, I saw that she was backed against a door. I didn’t know what was happening, so I stepped between the two of them and stood there until she had time to turn around and run back out. I followed Abby into the dressing room and started to chastise him for staying in character and scaring her. I thought it was unnecessary because, other than the little girl, there were no fans there to see it. "What was that all about? What were you doing?" I yelled.

I don’t know what came over me, but I went over to Abby and hit him in the forehead with my fist. It caught him off-guard and he fell to the floor in a daze, but I don’t think it really hurt him too badly. I know it hurt my hand worse than his head because my fist immediately blew up like a balloon. Believe me, his gimmick of having a hard head wasn’t a gimmick. His head really was hard.

After falling to the floor, Abby jumped right back up and said, "What’s the matter?"

"That was unnecessary! You didn’t have to scare that little girl! She’ll probably have bad dreams about that!"

My hand stayed swelled up for the next three days. Looking back on the incident, I can’t believe I did that. I’m not the kind of guy who goes around hitting people, but I was pumped up that night with adrenaline. Later on, I apologized to Abby. Even today, years later, I still feel bad about it, and I apologize occasionally when I see him. He just laughs about it. We always got along so well and I admired his work. We remain good friends.

The many battles I had against Jimmy Valiant, aka Boogie Woogie Man, over the years have bonded us as friends.

In 1988, Jim Crockett sold the assets in his wrestling company, Jim Crockett Promotions, Inc., to Turner Broadcasting. For a couple of years before that, we traveled in two private planes that Crockett had purchased. One was a Lear Jet that seated about six to eight wrestlers, and the other was a larger propeller-driven plane that seated twice as many as the other. We didn't fly to all the shows, but we did fly on some of the longer ones, especially shows that were held back-to-back on the same day.

When we flew, we had some great times together. I remember many times on the way to the shows, we played cards. Boogie especially liked playing cards. We would play for a small wager, which Boogie would usually win. The return flights would get wild at times because Jim Crockett always stocked up the planes with cans of beer. We would have a contest to see who could chug-a-lug a beer the fastest. You had to follow the rules or be disqualified, but there was a technique to winning—you had to puncture a hole in the outside rim of the can with a manual can opener. This helped keep the fizz down, which allowed you to drink faster. While placing a finger over the hole, we opened the top and drank, racing against the clock, without taking a breath. Needless to say, I became very good at that and won many contests. The drive home that night was an even bigger challenge.

Boogie and I have a mutual respect for each other. Today, we stay in touch and try to help each other whenever we can. Boogie offers a free tour of his wrestling school to the public every Sunday at noon and he teaches afterwards until four o'clock. The school is called Boogie's Wrestling Camp and it is located in Shawsville, Virginia. About a year ago, while visiting with Boogie and Angel at their home, we took the tour of Boogie's Wrestling Camp. We were very impressed with the whole setup and the accommodations of his school. Renae and I often send potential students to Boogie's school and we highly recommend it.

Boogie and Angel return the favor by referring me to promoters for wrestling appearances and churches to share my testimony.

Boogie and his wife, Angel [and she is appropriately named] are a friendly, "down to earth" couple. Just being around them brightens our day! We can tell that Boogie and Angel are "soulmates." They are deeply in love and seem to have been made for each other. We are proud and honored to be their friends.

I really miss my brothers and sisters. I don't get a chance to visit them as much as I would like. Hopefully, I'll get an opportunity to see them soon.

As I said earlier, I lost my brother, Philip, to cancer, my sister, Jarmaine, to a drug overdose, and my brother, Bob, in a car accident.

My oldest sister, Leona, lives in the northern part of British Columbia near Red Deer, Alberta. She is about 5 years older than me, which makes her about 69 years old. She has several children, all of whom are grown up and married. Leona is a sweetheart of a lady. When we were kids, she really kept us in order when our parents weren't around. We had to listen to her and do what she told us to do. If we messed up the floor after she mopped it, we would get the mop across our head. I really miss her and haven't had the opportunity to meet her new husband, Jim. I look forward to visiting with them.

I really looked up to Roger. When Morris and I moved from Ottawa to Hamilton, he let us stay at his house, rent free, until we were able to find a place of our own. I always remembered his advice about reading and try to apply it to my reading of scripture.

Ray, who is retired, lives in Ontario near Ottawa. Morris has owned a successful cleaning business for many years. Morris and his wife, Donna, got married when they were only 17 years old, and they have been happily married ever since. Jerry lives in Alberta, near Red Deer, close to my sister, Leona. My youngest sister, Jean, and her husband, Cliff, still live in British Columbia.

I am so happy and proud of the wrestlers that have received Christ into their lives and have made the commitment to live for Him. Renae and I correspond with Joe Blanchard, Tully's dad, through e-mail. He sends us

Christian teachings every day. We really look forward to getting his sermons.

When I heard that Lex Luger had become a Christian, I called Nikita to confirm it and he verified it for me. Nikita said Lex came to the Christian conference this year with his pastor. He had already dedicated his life to Christ and gave a good testimony at the convention. Brutus Beefcake was there, too. When they went to the prison, Brutus gave such a powerful testimony that a lot of inmates gave their life to Christ. I could tell that he was sincere.

Ted DiBiase, aka The Million Dollar Man, came up with the idea of using wrestling crusades to spread God's Word. Several churches usually sponsor the events and they are advertised as a wrestling show. On each crusade, Ted presents wrestling matches with a few top-name guys. When the matches are over, the guys give their testimony and an invitation to accept Christ is given. I have been involved in a few of those crusades and they have been quite successful.

George South also puts together crusades, but on a smaller scale, normally having only one church sponsoring each event. The guys who have been involved in those have been myself, as well as Sting, Nikita Koloff, Greg Valentine, George South, Road Warrior "Animal," Jimmy Valiant, Ricky Morton, Buff Bagwell, Barbarian, and others. George South also features wrestlers that he has personally trained at his Exodus Wrestling School, as well. This is not only an honor to be included in George's crusades, but a great thrill to be able to be in front of an audience again. When I work against George, I don't have to do much of anything. George will talk a match, so that makes it easy.

It's great to be a part of an operation like the Exodus Wrestling Alliance. Most of his shows are charity events or paid shows. George is a good, Christian man who prays in the dressing room before going out for his match. It's funny because he has John 3.16 on his trunks, but he work as a heel in the old style of wrestling. The people today know that wrestling is a work, so it's not like his actions in the ring contradict his words.

I have also enjoyed working for some of the independent promoters, such as Keith Krockett and Greg Price, who have invited me to share my faith at their events.

After everything I've been through, I feel blessed that God has given me the opportunity to help other people make positive changes in their lives.

I first met my wife, Renae, in 1980, when a mutual friend, Billie, introduced us at a wrestler's birthday party. Renae was slowly losing her interest in wrestling, but we would see each other in passing. As time went by, we became good friends when we discovered that we had a lot of interests in common.

First of all, we both started to watch wrestling at about the same age. I was 8 years old, she was nine. We both fell in love with wrestling immediately and wanted to be a wrestler when we grew up.

When Renae was a young teenager, her all-time favorite wrestler was Blackjack Mulligan. She admired his strength, his ability in the ring, and his interviews. However, Renae loved Ric Flair's style so much that she decided to be the female carbon copy of Ric, much the same way that Ric had copied Buddy Rogers' style years before. She planned to call herself "Nature Girl Erica Flair."

Renae and I were both married to other people when we were getting to know each other, but in spite of that, we began to see each other on a regular basis and our relationship grew to be much more than just friendship. Two years after we met, our daughter Rachel was conceived.

When Renae and I came to the realization that what we were doing was wrong, we decided that we were going to try to make our marriages work. We went our own ways and Renae resolved to forget about me and move on with her life. For five years, we did not see each other, but we never forgot each other.

Years later, when I gave my heart to Christ, I felt compelled to admit my former lifestyle and transgressions to my wife. The long and short of it is that she was unwilling to forgive me and we filed for divorce … after 29

years of marriage. As always, there’s a price to pay when you do wrong things.

Renae and I got back together and we lived together for 18 months before we were married in September 1996 in a church ceremony with family and friends present. After we were married, we both rededicated our lives to Christ.

Chapter 18
Renae's Story

by Renae Koloff

I hesitated when I was first asked to write about myself, from being a "wrestling fanatic" once upon a time, to being Ivan’s wife today. I did not want to take away from his book.

He said that it would be good to let the fans know that one of the things we have in common is our love for "old-school wrestling."

So here goes …

The youngest of six children, I was raised in Greenville, North Carolina, with a strong Christian upbringing. I was saved as a young girl and sang regularly in church. My mother laid a solid foundation for me, which I will always be thankful for. She "made me go to church each and every time the doors were open." There were no exceptions.

When I turned 18 years old, I became rebellious, quit going to church, and eventually left home. Like most teenagers, I wanted my freedom. I thought I knew it all. You couldn’t tell me anything!

Before that, though, I fell in love with wrestling at the young age of 9 years old. It was out of the ordinary for a girl to be so interested in wrestling, but wrestling became my first love. Beginning in 1968, I watched the TV programs which were taped in nearby Raleigh, North Carolina.

I knew everything about each wrestler and was called a walking encyclopedia by my friends who also enjoyed wrestling. Yes, I was a wrestling fanatic!

In 1972, my big sister, Sherry, started taking me to the wrestling matches promoted by Jim Crockett. I guess she figured she would rather take me to the matches than put up with my "bratty" attitude. In time, she grew to love wrestling as much as I did.

We went to Raleigh, Greensboro, Fayetteville, and any town we could find in-between. If wrestling was being held, I had to be there! Every other Tuesday night, I was at Dorton Arena in Raleigh, and every other Wednesday night, I was at the WRAL-TV studio in Raleigh for Mid-Atlantic Championship Wrestling, and later, the World Wide Wrestling tapings. Bob Caudle, David Crockett, Les Thatcher, Ed Capral, and announcer Rich Landrum, made it all extra special. Admission was free, and seating was limited on a first-come, first-seated basis, but we always arrived early.

I "lived" to cheer on Blackjack Mulligan because he was my very favorite. I knew he could clean the ring out quickly, no matter how many wrestlers were in the ring and no matter how tough they were.

I hung on every word that Blackjack said during his interviews. I booed, screamed, and fussed/cussed out every opponent that Blackjack wrestled, to a point where my throat would be so sore that I could barely talk the next day.

I made such a ruckus that the people in the audience would often be watching me, instead of the matches. I guess I must have been real entertaining …

If Blackjack lost his match, or got hurt, I was completely devastated. I would be upset until the next time I saw him wrestle. Of course, that didn’t happen to often. Blackjack usually won his matches.

When Crusher Blackwell beat Blackjack one night, I was so mad that I felt like I wanted to kill him. At least I never acted on my thoughts, but professional wrestling was serious business in those days. Back then, if somebody had made the comment around me that "wrestling was fake," they would have had to fight me.

On Saturday nights, I had exclusive rights to the use of our television, and I was willing to fight for those rights. No one was a more devoted fan than me. It was very serious business. I insisted that nobody in the room make a sound, not even a whisper. I didn't want to miss one single word.

At 6:05 p.m., before the WRAL show aired, I would be sitting right in front of the TV, ready to watch two hours of Georgia Championship Wrestling on WTBS, Channel 3. Later that night, Championship Wrestling From Florida aired.

At 11:30 p.m., it was time for the main event—NWA/Mid Atlantic Wrestling on Channel 5, WRAL—the very same show I saw live just four nights before!

My family just humored me, because I was the baby and they knew how much of a "wrestling fanatic" I really was. You couldn't be around me for very long before you soon found out. I was very proud of that fact.

I never went to a live match in Florida, but I wish I had taken the opportunity to do so. My favorite tag team there was Mike Graham and Steve Keirn. Of course, I cannot forget the late, great Gordon Solie. There will never be another announcer like him. His captivating voice and enthusiasm added so much to the wrestling. He made it all seem so exciting and important.

In 1974, I met the great Ric Flair at Dorton Arena in Raleigh. Although the heels weren't allowed to talk to the fans back then, Ric started talking to me in the doorway where the wrestlers walked out. I remember being terrified to speak to him, but I mustered up the nerve to talk. At first, I thought he acted too conceited and unfriendly, even though I did like his style, but after talking to him for a few minutes, I found that he was rather nice and different. In fact, he was very different from what I had seen on TV and in the ring. In real life, he was a soft-spoken, polite, down to earth guy.

I liked Ric's flamboyant style and the way he could get the crowd so worked up. Most people cheered for the good guys, but not me. I liked the bad guys the best. I always cheered for Ric, except, during the time when he was feuding with BJ. I was a die hard fan of Blackjack Mulligan.

I have to laugh when I remember Mike Fever, and the Mulkeys, Bill and Randy. I always felt so sorry for them because they always got beat up.

In 1975, my sister started taking me to IWA (International Wrestling Association) matches, a smaller independent group, when they came to town. I watched guys wrestle such as Bulldog Brower, Rip Hawk, Sonny King, Ernie Ladd, Johnny Powers, "Beautiful" Bruce Swayze, and Flying Phil Watson.

I also saw the original Sheik [Ed Farhat] on a couple of occasions. I remember that well because the man almost terrorized me to death. One night at the ballpark, I was standing nearby when he jumped outside of the ring to attack Mighty Igor. I almost broke my neck trying to get away from him. I thought he was an insane man who needed to be locked up and have the key thrown away. His character was very believable to the fans.

Mighty Igor became my favorite wrestler because he would always come out and talk to the fans. He wrestled as a mentally challenged, friendly, Polish guy. However, Igor would talk to my sister and me with a different, intelligent voice when the crowd wasn’t around. For some reason, he liked us. He would comment about other matches while they were going on and would have us laughing the whole time. We became his friends and he was soon inviting my sister and me to join him at a nearby restaurant after the matches.

Now you really couldn’t tell me anything!

I even had bragging rights, but nobody at school would believe me.

One night in 1975 after the matches were over, my sister and I asked Igor if he would come to our house to meet our parents. We lived so close to the ballpark. Much to our surprise, Igor said, "Sure," and he came over to our house. That night, our parents woke up to meet Igor. They almost died from that surprise and, like everybody else who met him, they immediately fell in love with him. They enjoyed his visit so much that they invited him to come back any time he was in town.

Igor stopped by our house on a few other occasions. He would tell stories about his life in wrestling, share crazy ideas that he had, or tell hilarious jokes. Igor was a great comedian. He would have us all in tears from laughing so hard.

My dad, Ernest, was impressed with Igor's wrestling character and his business knowledge. He was doubly impressed when Igor said, "I don't throw away my money on fancy cars and parties, like some of the wrestlers do." He said he invested in farmland in Wisconsin, and drove an old car so he could save his money.

Mighty Igor, aka Dick Garza, became a family friend. Even after he left the territory, he would call from time to time, just to ask how we were doing.

One day, I told Igor that I wanted to be a wrestler when I got older. I wanted to be just like Ric Flair. I knew that I could be great at it, too, because I had studied Ric's every move and I had him down to a T. I amazed my friends and family because I sounded and acted so much like Ric. I even bleached my hair platinum blonde.

I copied his walk, his talk (wooooo!), everything! I memorized every interview that he did. I even copied the way he chewed his gum. I was running and lifting weights everyday, getting in shape for my big debut. I practiced my interviews in front of the mirror … when I was alone. After all, this was really getting to be serious business!

I could imagine my name on the giant marquee. I was going to be "Nature Girl, Erica Flair," female heel wrestler.

I figured if Ric could pattern himself after Nature Boy Buddy Rogers, then I could pattern myself after him!

Every time I talked to Igor, I would bring up the fact that I was "going to be a wrestler, just like Ric Flair." I guess he got worried that I was too serious, because when he spoke to my parents again, he told them that I shouldn't pursue wrestling. "Wrestling is no kind of a life for a girl," Igor said. He explained to us that wrestling and life on the road was a tough lifestyle for the men. It was much harder on a woman. He also convinced my family

that one day, I would want to be married and have a family, and it would be almost impossible to do that if I was a wrestler.

When Igor kept insisting that "you don’t need to be a wrestler," I was pretty upset. However, I knew that Igor was quite different from the character that he portrayed, and that he was really an intelligent man. I started to think, "Igor knows more than me about the lifestyle of wrestling."

I eventually gave up on my dream. Having been a fan for such a long time, and having met so many of the wrestlers, I learned so much about the business that I was glad that I decided against pursuing wrestling as an occupation. After I learned how very hard the "wrestling life" was—being on the road so much, injuries, worries about money—I respected the wrestlers even more.

Looking back on it now, Igor did the right thing. There will never be another Mighty Igor. I always respected him, as both a person and a friend. God rest his soul.

Around the end of 1975, I met my hero, Blackjack Mulligan. After the matches in Raleigh were over, Blackjack stepped outside and walked to his car. I felt like my heart was going to stop! That was the first time that my hero had been so close to me … almost within arm’s reach. I thought, "I’ve got to get up close enough to speak to him."

There were so many fans crowding around Blackjack, trying to speak to him, or to tell him what they thought of his dastardly deeds. Desperately, I pushed my way through the crowd and right into him.

I managed to blurt out, "Excuse me, but I am YOUR BIGGEST FAN!"

I felt that I had the right to that title. Blackjack bent down, hugged me, and said, "Well, I appreciate that, honey."

I was walking on Cloud 9 for the next year. I was a lifelong fan of BJ’s forever. I even told all of my friends, "Blackjack said he appreciated me being his biggest fan."

To this young, impressionable, teenage wrestling fan, Blackjack Mulligan could leap tall buildings in a single bound, and never even work up a sweat. He was invincible. Superman was NOTHING compared to Blackjack Mulligan. Nobody was that tough!

I remember saving my money to purchase a trophy. It was a big trophy with a wrestler figure standing on the base with his hands in a claw position. It was shiny and gold, and the plate on the front was engraved with, "To the Greatest Wrestler in the Whole World—Blackjack Mulligan."

I gave the trophy to BJ at a local high school event one night. He was genuinely surprised to be getting a trophy from a fan. He told me that it was the nicest thing a fan had ever given him. And it came from my heart.

It’s funny the things you do when you’re young.

Of course, I’m much older now, and wiser, and more mature, and not as impressionable.

But I’m still a mark for Blackjack Mulligan.

Eventually, when I became an adult, my perspective on things began to change. I stopped going to the matches and only watched it on television. When Jim Crockett Promotions sold the company to Turner Broadcasting in 1988, wrestling was just never the same. I was going to do other things and move on with my life. Besides, wrestling would always be around. Little did I know …

Most of the wrestlers were very nice and respectful. They even knew me by name when I walked up. I almost felt like I was one of them! It was as though we all were "one big happy family." There were only a few who weren’t very nice. I’m not naming names because that isn’t important, but Blackjack Mulligan, Jimmy Valiant, Abe Jacobs, and the late Tim Woods, were the most genuine, respectful wrestlers I ever met.

Of all the wrestlers I have ever known, Ivan Koloff was the nicest and most respectful man I ever met. Even if I wasn’t married to Ivan now, I would still say that.

Ivan and I are still fans of "old-school wrestling," but in our opinion, it died out a long time ago. However, thanks to the magic of videotape, we are still entertained by videos of the matches, which bring back many happy memories of the good ol’ days.

Most of all, Ivan and I are just so thankful that we were a part of it. Today, when we hear fans talk about the drama and the high-risk moves in "wrestling," we grieve all over again for the old-school style. We think to ourselves, "Kid, you’ll just never really know," because wrestling as we knew it has died.

No one even gave wrestling a decent burial …

— Renae Koloff —

Chapter 19
A Tribute to My Friends

I owe so much to so many of the guys I worked with. They played such a big part in my life that I would be remiss if I didn't mention them.

Bruno Sammartino —
My hero; a record setter; a great example; a gentleman; forever indebted to him.

(The late) Vince McMahon Sr. —
Always a friendly gentleman; great promoter of old school wrestling; appreciated his friendship.

(The late) Paul Boesch —
A fair promoter; a good friend.

Blackjack Mulligan —
A good friend today; a giant talent wherever he was; demanded respect from everyone; a real tough guy, but gentle as a lamb.

Ric Flair —
A true world champion, 16 times; always a gentleman; polite and respectful; brings out the best in you.

Stan Hansen —
Easy going; 300-pound; non-stop; fantastic worker.

Jimmy Valiant —
A good friend; a pleasure to wrestle; always a huge draw.

Nikita Koloff —
My brother In Christ; very convincing; always gives 100% in whatever he is doing.

Wahoo McDaniel —
They threw away the mold; was a good friend; a fiery opponent; tough as rawhide; gone but not forgotten.

Roddy Piper —
Explosive performer; great talent on the mike and in the ring; loveable guy.

Nicolai Volkoff —
A powerhouse; sincere; likeable comrade.

Dusty Rhodes —
A great asset to the business as a wrestler and booker; a friend since 1968.

Barbarian —
Very powerful; great performer; former partner with Warlord aka Powers of Pain; was an awesome tag team partner.

Don Kernodle —
Genuine; was always an asset to the business; always a hard worker.

Krusher Khrushchev [Barry Darsow] —
Clever worker; honest guy.

Alexis Smirnoff —
A good hockey player; talented wrestler; my tag team partner in Atlanta; work horse.

Ole Anderson —
A stern booker and wrestler; proved himself many times.

Ricky Morton and Robert Gibson aka Rock n Roll Express —
Great box office draw; super-nice guys.

Vladimir Petrov —
An intimidator, but a gentle guy; I liked him.

Paul Jones —
A friend since 1965; great in the office; knowledgeable in the ring as a wrestler and manager.

Tony Atlas —
Very nice and down to earth; what a powerhouse!; still looks like Mr. USA to me.

Greg Valentine —
Another brother in Christ; good-natured; tough just like his dad, the late Johnny Valentine.

Jimmy Snuka —
A brother in wrestling; very agile; great performer!

Boris Zhukov —
Another tough Russian; real nice guy; did a great imitation of me.

Ronnie Garvin —
One tough Canadian ... in boxing, wrestling, and flying high!

Bob Backlund —
One tough competitor and one nice gentleman.

Red Bastein —
Fiery redhead; great talent; knew how to take care of himself in and out of the ring!

Billy Robinson —
A real life "hooker," one of a kind.

(The late) Andre the Giant —
Made me feel like a midget when I wrestled him; gentle giant; glad he liked me!

Superstar Billy Graham —
Always an inspiration; tag team partner in several territories; came before Hulk Hogan and Jesse Ventura.

Captain Lou Albano —
One heck of a great manager; helped me get my break in New York.

Animal and (the late) Hawk, aka The Road Warriors —
An awesome tag team; a pleasure to have worked with them.

(The late) Lou Thesz —
One tough champion with a good heart; will never be forgotten.

Jacques Rougeau Sr. and (the late) Johnny Rougeau —
Originator of the name "Ivan Koloff," took me under their wing in 1968; great tag team.

Bulldog Brower —
A wildman in the ring and a scary performer who I watched and admired him over the years.

Mighty Igor —
A real life strongman and good-natured guy; we all loved him.

Gene Kiniski —
Non-stop, great world champ.

Angelo Mosca —
A fellow Canadian who excelled at both football and wrestling, yet in the ring, he was another one who was as gentle as a lamb.

Gorilla Monsoon —
Was good to me in and out of the ring; gave me advice and direction

Bobo Brazil —
Only wrestled him a couple times; nice man; had a great career in the business.

Jay Strongbow —
Great Indian WWWF wrestler; we had good matches together.

Bull Bullinski —
Had many matches with Frank Shields; a great man; helped me a lot.

Verne Gagne —
Always appreciated him as a tough wrestler and promoter.

Don Muraco —
Wrestled Don when he first started and admired his skills over the years.

Rip Hawk —
Veteran of wrestling; very good tag team with Swede Hanson; I always enjoyed being around him.

Bobby Fulton —
One of the Fantastics; I learned from him when we had a wrestling school; good man.

Thunderbolt Patterson —
Unique style; fans really loved and believed in him!

Luis Martinez —
Fiery spark plug; good wrestler; strong stomach.

Wilbur Snyder —
Another legit tough wrestler; had talent; nice man.

Baron von Raschke —
A humble, yet great, talent, and a gentleman (although he and Charlie Fulton were jokingly called troublemakers).

Paul Christy —
A very good performer; stayed locally around Chicago; a lot of fire in the ring!

Dick the Bruiser —
A great football player, promoter and wrestler; he spoke his mind and didn’t take any junk.

Eddie Graham —
A solid wrestler; great mind for the wrestling business.

Mr. Saito —
Excellent Japanese wrestler, tag or single; good friend.

Pat Patterson —
Good talent; a forgiving person (I hit him and hurt his eardrum during an interview).

Ivan Putski —
A strong man; people loved him; ideal opponent for me.

Dino Bravo —
An exceptional performer; missed by all; nice man.

Ricky Steamboat —
Had ALL the qualities to be the world champ and held many belts.

Masked Superstar —
Very intelligent wrestler; portrayed many roles and filled a lot of seats.

Mr. Fuji —
We started together in 1966 in Portland, Oregon; friend and super talent.

Ray Stevens —
The crippler; great performer; wildman, but a lot of fun; miss him.

Great Kabuki —
Tag in Florida; wrestled in Japan; great worker; very convincing.

Playboy Gary Hart —
Fans loved to hate him; very good manager.

Manny Fernandez —
A great athlete and wrestler; I got along great with Manny.

Angelo Mosca Jr. —
Solid worker in great shape; a big asset like his dad.

Bobby Jaggers —
A very good wrestler, as a single or team with Dutch Mantel.

Barry Windham —
Definitely world champ caliber wrestler, and always a gentleman like his

dad.

Chapter 20
Me-Ma and Pa-Pa

If I could do it all over, one of the things I would do is try to negotiate better contracts with the promoters. Maybe I wouldn’t have gotten any further than I did, but I would have tried to talk to them and negotiate because we really had no idea of what the promoter was willing or able to pay. There was no set pay scale that we could reference. Most of us went into a territory for what we were offered, with little idea of what we were really worth to the promoter. You couldn’t ask another top man, "What did you make in that territory?" Many of them would lie to you. Granted, there were times when I told the promoter, "I want to make at least $1,000 a week," and at times, I got what I asked for, but for all I knew, I might have been worth $2,000 a week. Many times, years later, I discovered that the guy I was working against, or the guy I was tag teamed with, WAS getting $2,000 a week.

I would also try to settle down in one territory, and not move around so often. The constant moving hurt my relationship with my family. There were guys who went to a territory and stayed there for most of their career, like Paul Jones did in Charlotte. When I first went to Charlotte in 1974, he was living there, and when I retired in 1989, he was still living there.

I was on the road so much that I didn’t have a bonding relationship with my children. I saw them so little that they must have thought, "Who is this guy who calls himself my father?"

When my children were teenagers, I tried to stay near the Carolinas, but even then, I was still on the road. By the time I got home at night, they would be in bed. When they left for school in the morning, I was still asleep. To make matters worse, on the weekends, when most families are together doing family activities, I was still on the road. Many times, Sunday was a day when promoters would run both an afternoon and an evening show, so I didn’t see my kids at all that day.

My oldest daughter, Doreal, is a housewife who now lives in England with her seven children. I don’t have the ability to go over there and she can’t come over here, but we converse by mail — not as often as I would like, but we’re on good terms and I love them all.

My children from my first marriage are Elizabeth and Donald, ages 33 and 34.

Elizabeth is married and is a successful manager of an apartment complex.

Donald, who lives in British Columbia, is a martial arts instructor, and from what I understand, he’s very good at what he does. He works hard and is athletic. He’s a big guy, but he keeps himself in great shape. When we talk, he asks about my weight. If I’m overweight [which I always am], he encourages me to workout and lose some weight. We worked out together one time, doing stretching exercises that he does for the martial arts. I was so sore that I couldn’t walk for a couple of days.

I always tried to keep my family life private when I was in the wrestling business. We tried to shelter our children, but their classmates always seemed to find out who we were.

At one time or another, at least before the mid-‘80s, most wrestlers’ kids had to put up with things in school like their classmates saying, "Your father isn’t so tough. Wrestling’s all fake." Donald was harassed way beyond the "fake" thing. For some reason, people held genuine hatred for me because they believed that I really was a Russian. Donald heard things from his classmates like, "Your father’s a dirty, Russian commie!"

Even though I don’t have any problem being honest with people about the business, I still involuntarily flinch when people walk up and ask, "Is that wrestling fake?"

The fans would have never asked that question in the ‘70s. Even if they weren’t totally convinced that it was real, they wouldn’t have had the guts to ask such a question.

In the ‘80s, most adults understood that professional wrestling was entertainment, but a lot of kids still thought wrestling was a shoot [real competition]. They didn’t understand that the characters we portrayed in the ring were a pretense.

As a result, Donald was picked on and would come home occasionally with a bloody lip after having been in a fight. By the time he was 16 years old, he started working out with weights and he began fighting back. He got his licks in and earned the respect of his classmates. It was hard for kids, even for the kids of the good guys, like Barry and Kendall Windham, Blackjack Mulligan’s kids. People thought they were tough because their dad was a wrestler. Fortunately, they were big kids who could take care of themselves.

I regret to say that Donald and I never had the father-son type of relationship because I was always on the road and away from home, but today, we talk regularly on the phone. He did travel with me to some independent shows after I quit WCW.

Our youngest daughter is Rachel. Rachel, now 24 years old, was an honor student all the way through school. She can sing just about any style, but she loves gospel singing. I can’t hold a tune in a bucket, but I’ve heard her sing a cappella and she sounds like an angel.

Rachel married her high school sweetheart, Chris, in 2001. They were married in the same church that Rachel attended all of her life with her grandma, Ruth. I’m very proud of Chris. He works very hard to provide for his family. Chris and Rachel have been happily married for almost six years, have a beautiful home in the country, are active in their church, and set a good example for our granddaughters, Carah and Alyssa.

Carah, our first granddaughter, is three-and-a-half years old and is already a real prayer warrior. When I was doing a crusade, my back started to hurt and I couldn’t straighten up. The next morning, when I was feeding Carah her cereal, I said, "Carah, could you pray and ask Jesus to straighten Pa-Pa’s back?"

Carah stopped eating her cereal, raised her hand into the air, and started saying something. It was obvious that she was praying. She didn’t stop to

think about it. She just did it. That's a great testament to her parents, who are great examples to her. She's really a blessing to her Me-Ma [Renae] and Pa-Pa [me].

Renae's widowed mother, Ruth, went home to be with the Lord in April 2006, after suffering with cancer for six years. Renae and I were her caregivers. Two weeks later, God blessed us with Alyssa, our youngest granddaughter.

Of course, having our children and grandchildren nearby makes it hard for Renae and me to go on the road. If we're gone for any length of time at all, Me-Ma gets anxious to get back to our daughter and our granddaughters. We live less than five miles from them, so we can see them almost every day.

I count myself lucky to have any relationship with my kids. I cherish every moment that I have with them, even if it's only on the telephone.

My wife, Renae, and I stay busy during the week. We spend as much time together as we can, and we especially enjoy sharing that time with our immediate family. We also enjoy listening to Gospel and Classic Country music, and when we have the opportunity, we go to watch demolition derbies, an event where cars crash into each other. We enjoy the derbies that are held at local fairs in our area. Renae and I each pick out our favorite car and cheer them on. It's a big adrenalin rush.

We attend activities at our church and do charity work on the weekends. We also try to keep fit, spending our time walking in the evenings and working out in our gym. I have to work out my neck every day because it has gravel in it from the clotheslines, elbows, and being snapped back with backdrops. Renae also loves the computer and continues to pursue her education on the Internet. She also helps to maintain my website. In addition to our grandchildren, we have six cats that we spoil almost as much as we do our grandchildren.

Almost every day where I live, whether I'm in a store or a restaurant, people walk up and say, "You're that wrestler … Ivan Koloff!"

Many of them are young adults and older because I haven’t been on TV in over 15 years, but it’s a big thrill for me to realize that people remember me. I also get a kick out of hearing them say, "You haven’t changed!"

Yes, I know it’s not true, but I’d like to think that it is.

I don’t look at myself as being anything special. I never have. I’m just an ordinary guy who got the breaks and was able to live his dream. And that’s exactly what professional wrestling was to me. It was my dream. It was something that I always wanted to do.

I didn’t ever expect to win the WWWF title in Madison Square Garden. I just wanted to be a wrestler. Everything that happened beyond that, was just another of God’s gifts to me.

Afterword

Having served time in jail myself, I am going to try to reach out to everyone, and try with the best of my ability to help and console. I am not going to come at you with a self-righteous or holier-than-thou attitude, because all it would do is drive you away before you have an opportunity to read on any farther.

I don’t care what you’ve done or how tough you are. Whether you admit it or not, everyone needs help at one time or another. We all need someone.

I will admit that some men have gone so far as to actually enjoy the bad things they have done. They have no conscience or desire to face the reality of having to admit right from wrong. However, I still believe that even this group of untouchable, tough guys reach out and need support from other people at various times in their lives.

Basically, we all must believe that we came from somewhere. Evolutionists contend that we came from a cellular beginning, but even they cannot comprehend the chemical conditions that are necessary to prove their theory.

I hope and pray that at least one person reading this book will come to accept God, will come to "grips" with their situation, and will be filled with the peaceful spirit and demeanor that God will give you. God’s direction in your life will only make your life go better and you will become a better person for it. Remember, I have been through just about every life situation that you find yourself facing! I know the heartaches you feel. I know the pain and devastations we have brought upon ourselves, and most of all, the havoc we have put our families through. At other times, however, we put ourselves into positions where we have no control over what happens.

So, what can we do?

I do not believe that it was just an accident that you have read this book. God has a purpose for both you and your life. If you were to die right now, do you know, without any doubt, whether you would go to heaven or hell? Well, there is a way that you can know for sure.

It's simple. If you have broken even one of the Ten Commandments, and you have not accepted God's gift of Jesus Christ in your heart, then you are NOT going to heaven. God cannot let sin into heaven.

However, God is righteous and He will forgive all of your sins. God has given you a gift of salvation through His son Jesus Christ, and He is the ONLY way to heaven. Jesus paid the price for our sins when he died on the cross.

The only things that God asks of you are to acknowledge that you are a sinner, to believe in your heart that Jesus died for you, and to ask Jesus for forgiveness of your sins. Then YOU ARE SAVED and you WILL go to heaven.

After you accept Jesus as your personal Savior, you need to find a church to attend. Make sure the church that you choose teaches from the Holy Bible. You will then be able to grow in the Lord by hearing His word and to receive encouragement and fellowship by being around other Christians.

In 1996, I heard God calling my name and I answered His voice, accepting His free gift of salvation. It was the best decision I could have made. My relationship with Jesus Christ, by faith, and applying His Word, has changed my life. Now, not only do I have eternal life, but I have hope and happiness.

I've always believed that "if it's not broke, don't fix it," but like a piece of shattered clay, I was broken and I needed the Potter, Almighty God, to remold and reshape me. Even though I was unworthy, He was good and merciful, and that is exactly why we need to understand. We are not complete without Him in our hearts.

Ephesians 6:12 tells us that our battle is a spiritual war, not physical. We are all creatures of habit, and it can sometimes be hard to change our way of

thinking. We seem to condemn ourselves by the power of our words. If we claim the word of the Lord, we can overcome any challenge from the enemy. The enemy, Satan, is very real, so don’t look at life as a game. It’s a fight to the finish for your soul. So if we want victory both here on earth and eternally, then we need to know and apply the Truth of God’s word in everything we say and do.

The Truth is, the victory has already been won by Jesus Christ. We have to believe and realize that this is a lifetime commitment of faith in God, so let’s put up a good fight and show that the enemy is a loser and a liar, and that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior.

My wife, Renae, and I want to dedicate the final chapter of this book to our dear Christian friends, Blackjack and Julia Mulligan. We highly recommend the Christian guidance that our friend, Blackjack, wrote in his own words. In our opinion, no one could have written it any better!

Addendum
Christian Facts Guidance

by Blackjack MULLIGAN

The facts are that we were created by God — a true, living, caring, existing, omnipresent creator. He controlled and planned our past, just as He plans and controls our futures. We have obviously gone astray from His plan for us, or we would not be in the situation we find ourselves in.

God has plans for all of us, no matter who we are, and He cares for us. It does not matter if you were raised with the right Christian values or not. He still cares for us and has plans for us. We have simply gone off track, and we need guidance and direction in obtaining the right direction He had intended us for.

Together, we will study and go through some of the unique problems of life and deal with them on a spiritual line as taught by God’s own Words from His guiding light, and that is the Holy Bible.

Don’t give up on this study if it seems hard for you at first. Give it time. Nothing of great value comes right away. We must grow in His Word like a small child grows up physically. God loves and cares greatly that we advance and gain understanding and wisdom through His Words, just as a parent loves and cares greatly that a child grows into a wise and understanding adult.

Well, my friends take heed! There is good news here! We can become servants of our Lord right where we are, and He controls all things. He controls what goes on beyond the barriers of the universe! There is no job He cannot handle and nothing He cannot change, so take heart and let us explore these things one by one.

OUTLINE OF STUDIES

1. Sin - What is it? Where does it come from? How did we get into this mess? What do we do now?
2. Greed
3. Bitterness, Anger,-Hatred
4. Attitude
5. Pride, Ego, Haughtiness
6. Trials and Punishment — Discipline
7. Alliances
8. Homosexuality
9. Patience and Salvation

I. SIN AND SIN NATURE

From the beginning of time (well, almost, anyway), we have had sin with us. We were created at first without sin, but man and woman changed that right away. Let us not try to blame it all on Eve because she "bit the apple," because we also took a bite. Sin began right there, that very moment. We are going to take a good look at sin, because we need to understand why God thinks the things we do are wrong.

We must always make a conscious effort to determine right from wrong. If we do not continually stay on guard and be watchful, sin or sin nature will take control, and we will once again be in violation of the law. It could be spiritual, or man’s law, to which we become responsible.

In the Gospel of Mark, the 4th chapter, verse 35 through the end of the chapter, we find a strong message to us, and a ray of light that is undeniably available to us at all times. In these verses, we find that Jesus had been teaching to a large crowd of people at the edge of the lake. The crowd became so large that He stepped into a boat. The boat was rowed out into the water a ways, and from there, He continued His teaching. As the hour was becoming late, Jesus told His disciples to cross over to the other side of the lake. As they continued their journey across the water, Jesus had retired below and was fast asleep. Suddenly, a violent storm came up and waves were about to sink the boat. Frightful for their lives, the disciples cried out, "Don’t you even care if we drown?" Jesus awoke and rebuked the wind and waves, and there was calm all about.

The scripture is an analogy of our lives. At times, we feel our boat is about to sink. We are in a terrible storm of life, and all things are going wrong. We are imprisoned and there is no hope. These actions have become the consequences of our sin. We get ourselves into all kinds of predicaments and find, more often than not, that we have no way out. It seems as if God is not with us, or is just not listening. We are wrong. If we will commit ourselves to Him and let Him take over guidance of our lives, He will answer us and help us. He is there waiting on us to call out for Him to save us, and He will help and has done it many times in the past.

The disciples panicked because the storm threatened to destroy them all, and Jesus seemed unaware and unconcerned. Theirs was a physical storm, but storms come in other forms, too. Think about the storms in your life — the situations that cause you great anxiety. Whatever your difficulty, you have two options. You can worry and assume that Jesus no longer cares, or you can resist fear by putting your trust in Him. When you feel like panicking, confess your need to God and then trust Him to care for you.

The disciples lived with Jesus, but they underestimated Him. They did not see that His power applied to their own situations. We have had twenty centuries of Jesus with us, and yet, we, like the disciples, underestimate His power to handle crises in our lives. The disciples did not yet know enough about Jesus. We cannot claim the same excuse.

Let us take a closer look at sin nature as described by Paul in Romans 7, and maybe we can start to unravel this problem we have. That is the problem of why we act the way we do.

Sin has always fooled people by misusing the law. When Eve encountered the serpent in the Garden of Eden, he fooled her by taking her focus off the freedom God had given her and putting it on the one restriction He had made ("Do not eat from the tree"). Ever since then, we have all become rebels. Sin looks good to us precisely because God has said it is bad. Instead of paying attention to His warning, we use them as "to do" lists.

When we feel rebellious, we need to back off and look at the law from a wider perspective — in the light of God’s grace and mercy. If we focus on

His great love for us, we will understand why He asks us to restrict our behavior. He only restricts us from things that ultimately will harm us.

Paul gives three lessons he learned in trying to deal with his sinful desires.

(1) Knowledge is not the answer. Paul felt fine as long as he did not understand what the law demanded. When he learned the truth, he knew that he was doomed.

(2) Self-determination does not succeed. Paul found himself sinning in ways that were not even attractive to him.

(3) Even a profound Christian experience does not instantly stamp out all sin from the believer's life. Becoming like Christ is a lifelong process. Paul likens Christian growth to a strenuous race or fight. What Paul is saying is that there is no one who is sinless. We are all doomed. We are all guilty. All of us must totally depend on the work of Christ for our salvation. We cannot earn it through good behavior.

This is more than the cry of a desperate man. It describes the experience of any Christian struggling against sin. We must never underestimate the power of sin. Satan is a crafty tempter, and we have a great ability to make excuses. Instead of trying to overcome sin with human willpower, we must take hold of the tremendous power of Christ that is available to us. This is God's provision for victory over sin. He sends the Holy Spirit to live in us and give us power, and when we fall, He lovingly reaches out to us and lifts us up.

"The Devil made me do it" sounds like a lame excuse, but it may be true. Galatians 5:16 says that if we "walk in the Spirit, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh." Without Christ's help, sin is stronger than we are, and sometimes, we are unable to defend ourselves against its attacks. That is why we should never stand up to sin alone. Jesus Christ, who has conquered sin once and for all, promises to fight by our side. If we look to Him for help, we will not have to give in to sin.

We can save ourselves a lot of trouble and heartaches with our walk in Christ if we dwell on this sin nature problem in-depth before we go further.

It is very important to understand that we alone cannot conquer our sinful ways and thoughts. The harder we try ourselves, the more trouble we get ourselves into. We must ask God to handle this area for us.

Now let us look at some of the consequences of sin. We are living the life at this moment of a person who is going through the consequences of sin.

I Peter 4:17-18 refers to God's discipline. God often allows the consequences of sin to take their course, even with believers. He does this for several reasons:(1) To show us our potential for sinning; (2) To encourage us to turn from sin and more constantly depend on Him; (3) To prepare us to face other, even stronger, temptations in the future; and (4) To help us stay faithful and keep on trusting Him.

If believers need earthly discipline from God, how much more will unbelievers receive it? If believers are "barely saved," what chance do those have who reject Christ? God created the world and has faithfully ordered and kept it since the creation. We know that He is faithful, and we know we can count on Him to fulfill His promises to us. If He can oversee the forces of nature, He surely can see us through the trials we face.

Hebrews 12:1 talks about laying aside the sin that so easily besets us. Laying aside sin and sin nature in our lives is not an easy task, and we may not feel strong enough to push on to victory. However, we will be able to overcome sin if we follow Christ and draw upon His strength. The key in Hebrews 12 to overcoming sin is in verse 2. We must look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. As we go through times of trial, we endure or overcome by focusing our attention on Him and drawing closer to Him. We then can use our growing strength to help those around us who are weak and struggling.

Like a small root that grows into a great tree, bitterness springs up in our hearts and overshadows even our deepest Christian relationships. Bitterness brings with it jealousy, dissension, and immorality. When the Holy Spirit fills our lives, however, He leaves no room for bitterness.

In this chapter of Hebrews, Esau's story shows us that mistakes and sins often have long lasting consequences. Even repentance and forgiveness do

not always eliminate sin’s consequences. How often do you make decision based on what you want now, rather than what you need in the long term? Evaluate the long-range effects of your decisions and actions. We are now experiencing the consequences of decisions and actions that did not take into consideration the long-range effects on our lives and the lives of our families, are we not? We must not really concern ourselves with the world we now live in because it will crumble. Romans 8:14 says, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

When we feel unsure about the future, we can take confidence from these scriptures. Whatever happens here, our future is built on a solid foundation that cannot be destroyed if we will only accept Him as our Savior and Christ.

The consequences of sin can be severe and far reaching. God does punish us for sin, and if you are a believer, it will most assuredly come. However, it is much better to be disciplined here than to lose your eternal soul and spend the rest of our lives in hell. In this brief writing, I have shown only a small sample of what God has to say about sin and its consequences. In the following list of scriptures, you will find direct comments on sin. Look them up, dwell on them, and ask God to give you understanding of their meaning.

Galatians 5:24; John 18:22-27; John 12:4-6; Luke 7:47; Mark 9:48-49; Matthew 12:43-45; Matthew 8:3; Psalms 55:10; Psalms 36:1; I Chronicles 22:1; II Samuel 2:23-25; Judges 16:28-30; Joshua 7:24-25.

II. GREED – II Chronicles, Chapter 10

When we try to have it all, or get motivated by power, we press too hard and risk losing everything we have. Sometimes, the consequence of being greedy is imprisonment. We were not satisfied with the life we were given, and in turn, sin has been deceptive to us and cost us dearly. Greed, pride, and ambition are all closely related. God frowns on these traits and we can be punished harshly for them. Further examples of scriptural greed can be found in Genesis 14:12; Numbers 11:34; Numbers 16:8-10; Matthew 26:14-15; and II Peter 2:15.

More often than not, we will find that, out of greed, the worship of money or material things will be the root of our problems and our ultimate downfall. In Matthew, we find the greatest act of greed of all time. Our Messiah was sold out for thirty pieces of silver. God knew this was to be, so why did He let it happen? Jesus had to die for our sins, and He was resurrected for us to obtain salvation. He illustrates here that time and time again, we will forsake Him for monetary gain. He had to die on the cross for our sins in order for the Holy Spirit to be sent to comfort us. He is always present, and all we have to do is reach out and He will answer.

III. BITTERNESS, ANGER, HATRED

Bitterness between two brothers, as recorded by the scriptures in Genesis 28:36, had caused a split in the family for years. Jacob had stolen Esau's birthright and had cheated his brother out of his portion of the family wealth. Jacob prayed about the matter, and after twenty years, the results were fruitful. When we are found with a difficult or urgent conflict, do we run around frantic, or do we pause to pray? Which approach do you think is most effective?

Life can deal us some bad situations. We can feel cheated as Esau did, but we do not have to remain bitter. We can remove bitterness from our lives by honestly expressing our feelings to God, forgiving those who have wronged us, and being content with what we have. Paul said in Philippians 4:11 that he had learned to be content in whatever state he was in. In Jacob's and Esau's situation, time away from each other had caused the bitter wound to heal. With the passing of time, each brother was able to see that their relationship was more important than real estate.

Hatred and bitterness are like weeds with long roots that grow in the heart and corrupt all of life. In the book of Esther 4-6, we find a man by the name of Haman, who was so consumed with hatred for Mordecai that he could not even enjoy life. Scripture "warns us" to watch out that no bitterness takes root among us. As it springs up, it causes deep trouble and hurts many in their spiritual lives. Do not let hatred and its resulting bitterness build in your heart.

Like Haman in this story, you will find that it backfires against you. If the mere mention of someone's name provokes you to anger, confess your bitterness of sin. Ignoring bitterness, hiding it from others, or making superficial changes in behavior is not enough. If bitterness is not completely removed, it will grow back, making matters worse. Haman had wealth, but he craved something even his money could not buy — respect. He could buy the trappings of success and power, but his lust for popularity had become an obsession. Do not let your desire for approval or applause drive you to immoral actions.

Haman's hatred and evil plotting turned against him as his intentions were discovered. He was hanged on the gallows that he had intended for someone else. Proverbs 26:27 says that a man who sets traps for others will fall into it himself. What happened to Haman shows the often violent results of setting any kind of trap for others.

In the book of Luke, 15:11, we find the parable of the prodigal son. One brother was very bitter towards the other for spending his inheritance foolishly, but his father welcomed him home unconditionally. We must do the same!

See if this does not ring close to home for us. It would be very difficult to accept the brother home today, just as it was in Jesus' time. People who repent after being notorious for their sinful lives ate often held in suspicion. Churches are sometimes even unwilling to admit them to membership. Instead, we should rejoice like the angels in Heaven when an unbeliever repents and turns to God.

In the story of the prodigal son, there is a contrast between the father's response and the older brother's reaction. The father was forgiving and overjoyed. The brother was unforgiving and bitter. The difference between joy bitterness is our capacity to forgive. We must remember Romans 3:23 which says, "All have sinned and come short of the Glory of God." We all have made mistakes. In Matthew 6:14-15, Jesus said that if we do not forgive others, that we would not be forgiven. If you are refusing to forgive people, you are missing a wonderful opportunity of experiencing joy and sharing with them. You are also in danger of not receiving forgiveness for yourself.

In the first chapter of Philippians, we find Paul imprisoned in Rome, and he gives us some good advice that we should heed. Paul calls for discernment — the ability to differentiate between right and wrong, good and bad, vital and trivial. Being imprisoned has caused many people to become bitter or to give up, but Paul saw it as another opportunity to spread the Good News of Christ. Paul realized his current circumstances were not as important as what he did with them. Turning a bad situation into a good one, he reached out to the guards and encouraged those Christian who were afraid of persecution.

We must look for opportunities to demonstrate our faith even in our bad situation. Regardless of whether or not the situation improves, our faith will grow stronger. In I John 3:15, we are told that a person who hates another person is a "murderer at heart." Outward compliance alone is not enough. Bitterness against someone who has wronged you is an evil cancer within you and will eventually destroy you. Matthew 7:1 says, "Judge not that you be not judged." If we continue to harbor bitterness and hatred toward someone, it will eventually come back to us.

IV. ATTITUDE - Mark 10 :17-27

Jesus here teaches us a lesson in how our attitudes affect our lives. What does money mean to us? Although Jesus wanted this man to sell everything and give his money to the poor, this does not mean that all believers should sell their possessions. He wants us to use our wealth to help others. We must not let anything keep us from following Jesus. We must remove all barriers to serve Him fully. If Jesus asks you to give up your house, sell your car, or change your way of eating, could you move to a crowded apartment in a poor neighborhood, ride the city buses, and never know where your next meal was coming from? If that is what He wanted you to do, your reaction to this situation will tell a lot about your attitude and money. It may be your barrier to eternal life.

In Luke 12:13-16, a person called out to Jesus and asked Him to settle a property dispute. Problems like this were often brought to the Rabbis for them to settle. Jesus’ response, though not directly to the topic, is not a change of subject. Jesus is pointing to the higher issue — a correct attitude

toward the accumulation of wealth. Life is more than material goods; our relationship with God is far more important.

Jesus put His finger right on the person's heart. When we bring problems to God in prayer, He often does the same thing for us. He shows us how we need to change and grow in our attitude toward the problem, and we discover that we have a different, but more effective, answer that we are looking for.

Jesus says the good life has nothing to do with being wealthy. This is the exact opposite of what society usually says. Advertisers spend millions of dollars to entice us to think that if we buy more and more of their products, that we will be happier, more in tune, and more comfortable. How do you respond to the constant pressure to buy? Learn to tune out expensive enticements and concentrate on the truly good life — living in a relationship with God and doing His work.

Many of us worry more about what is in our diets than what is in our hearts and minds. Jesus has pointed out that sin actually begins in attitudes and intentions of the inner person (see Mark 7:15-23). We are not pure because of our outward acts; we become pure on the inside as Christ renews our minds and makes us over in His image (see Romans 12:1-2). An evil action begins with a single thought. Our thoughts can pollute us, leading us into sin and trouble with the law. Allowing our thoughts to dwell on lust, envy, hate, or revenge will lead to evil actions. Do not allow yourself to be unfit for God. Instead, think about things that are pure and lovely, and dwell on the fine good things in others. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about.

In II Kings 1:1-15, we find an example of God's awesome power, when approached with the wrong attitude in heart. Notice how the third captain went to Elijah. Although the first two captains called Elijah "man of God," they were not being genuine. The third captain also called him "man of God," but he humbly begged for mercy. His attitude, which showed respect for God and His power, saved the lives of his men. Effective living begins with a right attitude towards God. Let respect characterize your attitude towards God and others.

In Ruth 2:7, we find another test of character. Here Ruth is doing a menial, tiring, and perhaps, degrading task. What is your attitude when the task you have been given is not up to your true potential? The task at hand may be all we can do, or it may be the work God wants us to do. On the other hand, as in Ruth's case, it may be a test of our character that can open up new doors of opportunity for us.

V. PRIDE, EGO, HAUGHTINESS

The Bible has many things to say about pride. James 4:6 says, "God resists-the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Pride can take many forms. It causes us to want recognition, makes us take too much of the credit, causes us to take credit for the deeds of others, leads to corruption, interferes with our ability to reason, and blinds us to our faults. The list is endless as to the damage pride can do to us.

One area in which pride can damage us seriously is when we do not understand the Bible. We should never allow pride to keep us from asking for help from others when we run across scriptures that we do not understand. God can use all of us to help one another, but we must be willing to swallow our pride .and ask for help when we need it.

John 7:51 talks about conviction before a trial. Nicodemas confronted the Pharisees with their failure to keep their own laws. The Pharisees saw themselves losing ground. The temple police came back impressed by Jesus, and one of their own, Nicodemas, was defending Him. With their hypocritical notions being exposed and their prestige slowly eroding, they began to move to protect themselves. Pride would interfere with their ability to reason, and soon they would become obsessed with getting rid of Jesus just to save face. What was good and right no longer mattered; they began to break their own laws by plotting to murder Jesus.

In Luke 10:18, Jesus warns us and His disciples about pride in the form of their power over evil spirits. We can have this same power if we ask Him for it and claim it. However, we must guard against the same abuse of it that got Lucifer thrown out of Heaven (see Isaiah 14:12-14). If one is given the

power to heal, prophesy, or casting out spirits, he must remain humble. He must remember that all these things are possible only through Christ.

"Who is the greatest" is an aspect of pride discussed in Mark 9:34. Jesus asked His disciples what they had been discussing. They had been caught up in their constant struggle for personal success, and they were embarrassed to answer Jesus' question. We will always find it painful to compare our motives with Christ's. Being industrious and ambitious is not wrong, but inappropriate pride in our ambition is sin. Pride or insecurity can cause us to value position and prestige more than service. In God's Kingdom, such motives are destructive. Our ambition should be for Christ's Kingdom and not for our own advancement.

Personal pride will breed prejudice if we consider ourselves better than someone else. Hating a group of people because of a difference in belief or culture is a form of prejudice created by pride. We will be judged harshly by God for a prideful attitude toward others.

In I Samuel 13:3-4, we find an example of taking credit for what others do. Here we find Saul taking credit for a battle that his son, Jonathan, had won. Jonathan had attacked and destroyed the Philistine garrison, but Saul took all the credit.

Saul's growing pride started out small, but left unchecked, it grew into an ugly obsession which threatened the well being of the nation. Taking credit for the accomplishments of others indicates that there is pride in your life. When you notice pride taking a foothold, take immediate steps to bring it in check by giving credit to those who deserve it.

VI. TRIALS — PUNISHMENT AND DISCIPLINE

God does not preserve us from difficult circumstances, but puts both the righteous and the wicked to the test. For some, God's tests become a refining fire, while for others, they become an incinerator for destruction.

Do not ignore or defy the tests and challenges that come our way in life, but look at them as opportunities for growth and improvement in our walk with God. Living for God in a deceitful world can be a difficult and lonely battle.

At one time, the great prophet Elijah felt so lonely that he wanted to die, but God told him that there were 7,000 other faithful men who had not bowed down to the wicked queen's god (see I Kings 19:4). We are never alone in our battle against evil. When you feel alone, seek out other believers from whom you can gain strength and support.

In Genesis 12:10, we find Abram's faith being tested. God had just called Abram away from his family and into a new land. Shortly after arriving in this land, a famine struck, and Abram continued on to Egypt where there was plenty of food. Abram did not question God's leading when he faced this difficulty. Many believers find that when they determine to follow God, they immediately encounter great obstacles. The next time you face such a test, do not try to second-guess what God is doing, but use the intelligence God gave you and wait for new opportunities.

Punishment and discipline are unpleasant for both the giver and the receiver, but they are a necessary part of growth. Sometimes, we get ourselves into positions that require us to be punished, but we must understand that realistic discipline and punishment are important to character development.

God does not punish us because He enjoys inflicting pain, but because He is deeply concerned about our development. He knows that in order to become morally strong and good, we must learn the difference between right and wrong. His discipline enables us to do this.

It is difficult to know when God has been disciplining us until we look back on the situation later. Not all bad things that happen to us come directly from God, but if we are in rebellion against Him, refusing to repent when He has identified some sin in our lives, we can safely assume that He is using guilt, crisis, or bad experience to encourage us to turn to Him. Sometimes, however, difficult times come when there is no flagrant sin in our lives. Our response then should be patience, integrity, and trust that God will show us what to do.

How do people become successful in their family life, in business or in athletics? How do we survive this ordeal that we are going through? The answer is all the same. By hard work, consistent discipline, and absolute

trust in God (Proverbs 3:5-6). The Christian life is much the same. Some people think that living a Christian life is too much work, but achieving anything worthwhile takes hard work. Being a Christian is not a shortcut to an easy life. When you search for wisdom, work hard at applying it, and live as God asks, you discover that no world success can compare with the joy of the Christian life.

God's discipline proves His love for His children (Hebrews 12). Who loves his children more — the father who allows the child to do what will harm him, or the one who corrects, trains, and even punishes the child to help him learn what is right? It is never pleasant to be corrected and disciplined by God, but His discipline is a sign of deep love for you. When God corrects us, see it as a proof of His love, and ask Him what He is trying to teach us. We may respond to discipline in several ways: (1) We can accept it with resignation; (2) We can accept it with self-pity, thinking we really do not deserve it; (3) We can be angry and resent God for it; or (4) We can accept it gratefully as the appropriate response towards our loving Father.

God is not only a disciplining parent, but also a demanding coach who pushes us to our limits and requires of us a disciplined life. Paul said in Philippians 3:14 that we must press towards the mark of the high calling of Christ Jesus. Although we may not feel strong enough to push on to victory, we will be able to continue as we follow Christ and draw upon "His" strength. Then we can use our growing strength to help those around us who are weak and struggling.

VII. ALLIANCES

Alliances are the most important and influential factors in our lives. We are going to take a good look at what the people we align ourselves with have to do with our attitudes, actions, and future. Basically, the sooner we face the reality of "we are who we associate with," the sooner we will be able to keep ourselves out of continual trouble. Some of the alliances that have an effect of our lives are the following: Government: We rely on government legislation to protect moral decisions we want made, but legislation cannot change peoples' hearts.

Science: We enjoy the benefits of science and technology, and look to scientific predictions and analysis before we look to the Bible.

Education: We act as though education and degrees can guarantee our future and success without considering what God has planned for our future.

Medical care: We regard medicine as the way to prolong life and preserve its quality – quite apart from faith and moral living.

Financial Systems: We place our faith in financial security — making as much money as we can for ourselves, forgetting that while being wise with our money, we must trust God for our needs (see Luke 12:16-21).

In II Corinthians 6:14, we are warned about alliances or partnerships with non-believers.

Paul urges us to not form binding relationships with non-believers because this might weaken our Christian commitment, integrity, or standards. This does not mean we are to isolate ourselves from non-believers, but we should not lock ourselves into personal or business relationships which could cause us to compromise our faith. Just as those in business should avoid conflicts of interests, believers should avoid situations that would force them to divide their loyalties.

II Chronicles 20:37 shows exactly what can happen when we align ourselves with evil people. We should read and dwell on this chapter and verse considerably. We are told throughout the Bible not to align ourselves with evil people because disaster will result. We are currently going through a situation, where if we had not been a member of a group, or joined with someone with the wrong intentions, we may not have wound up in our circumstances. Think about it! If we had not been associating with the wrong people, would not the outcome have been different?

In our scripture, we have King Jehoshaphat, who had been warned by prophesy, his father’s disastrous experience, and a personal experience with Ahab about unholy alliances. His partnership stood on unequal footing because the very foundation of their lives differed. While one serves the

Lord, the other man worshipped idols (money, etc.). We court disaster when we enter into partnership with unbelievers. While one partner recognizes God's authority, the other serves the world. Inevitably, the one who serves God is faced with temptation to compromise values. When that happens, spiritual disaster results.

Before entering into partnerships, ask the following questions: (1) What are motives? (2) What problems am I avoiding by seeking this partnership? (3) Is this partnership the best solution, or is it only a quick solution to my problem? (4) Have I prayed or asked others to pray for guidance? (5) Are my partner and I really working toward the same goals? (6) Am I willing to settle for less of this world's goods in order to do God's will?

The point of these scriptures and this discussion is that if, once released form this situation, we go right back to the same environment, the same people, the same deals, we are going to wind up back in trouble. We must let God take control of our lives, and we must find new friends.

It is very important that we do not try any quick fixes to help us recover financially, morally, or spiritually. We make changes in our lives and take a long look at the people who have been influencing us.

VIII. HOMOSEXUALITY

God speaks plainly on this matter in Romans 1:26-27. Natural affection between men and women, or males and females, is God's ideal plan for His creation. Unfortunately, what comes naturally to human nature is sin. Sin often means not only denying God, but also denying the way we are made. When our society says that any sex act is acceptable as long as no one gets hurt, it is fooling itself. In the long run (and often in the short run), sin hurts people — individuals, families, and whole societies. How sad that people who worship the things God made, instead of the creator, so often distort and destroy the very things they claim to value! However, it is impossible to understand God's natural plan without knowing the creator himself.

Homosexuality is strictly forbidden in scripture. Homosexuality is considered an acceptable practice by many in our world today — even by some churches. Many homosexuals believe that their desires are normal and

that they have a right to express them, but God does not obligate, nor encourage us to fulfill all our desires (even normal ones). Those desires that violate His laws are wrong and are to be avoided.

If you have this desire, you can and must resist acting upon it. Consciously avoid places or activities you know will kindle temptations of this kind. Do not underestimate the power of Satan to tempt you, nor the potential for serious harm if you yield to these temptations.

Remember, God can and will forgive sexual sins just as He forgives others sins. Surrender yourself to the grace and mercy of God, asking Him to show you the way out of sin and into the light of His freedom and His love. Prayer, Bible study, and strong Christian fellowship in a Bible-believing church can help you gain strength to resist these powerful temptations.

If you are already deeply involved in this sin, you may need to seek help from a trustworthy, professional and pastoral counselor. (other Biblical Scriptures on this matter: Leviticus 18:22; II Samuel 1:26; I Timothy 1:10-11).

IX. PATIENCE AND SALVATION: A GUIDE TO SURVIVING SUFFERING

II THESSALONIANS 1:4-5

The keys to surviving suffering are patience and faith. When we are faced with crushing troubles and hardships, we can have faith that God is using them for our good and for His glory. This trouble will better prepare us for His Kingdom. Knowing that God is fair and just gives us confidence that He has not forgotten us in our troubles, and in His timing He will relieve us of our suffering and will judge those who persecute us. As we live for Christ, we will experience troubles and hardships. Some say troubles are a result of sin. This may be so in some of our cases, but Paul teaches that they may be part of God’s plan for believers. (For instance, if not stopped from what we were doing, could it have been much worse if it continued?) Our problems help us to look upward and forward, not inward. They help us build character, and they help us to become sensitive to others who also must struggle.

There are two dimensions of the comfort mentioned by Paul. We can be comforted in knowing our sufferings strengthen us, making us ready for Christ's Kingdom. We can also take comfort in the fact that one day everyone will stand before God; then wrongs will be righted, judgment will be pronounced, and evil will be terminated.

In Luke 15:20, a father patiently watched and waited. His youngest son had taken his portion of the inheritance and gone to a far country to live the good life. After running out of money and having to take a job feeding swine, the son decided that he would be better back at his father's house. When the son returned to his father's house, he found his father waiting, willing and ready to take him back. God's love is constant and waiting. He will search for us and give us opportunities to respond, but He does not force us to come to Him. Like the father, He waits patiently for us to come to our senses.

In II Samuel 13, we find a very important lesson about not being patient and letting God take care of our problems. Instead, we take the matter into our own hands and usually make a big mess of things. Rather than wait for a priest, Saul offered the sacrifice himself. This was against the law. Under pressure from approaching Philistines, he took matters into his own hands and disobeyed God. He was doing a good thing, but he did it at the wrong time and in the wrong way.

Our true spiritual character is revealed under pressure, as was Saul's. The method we use to accomplish our goals is as important as the attainment of those goals. One of the most difficult times to trust God is when you feel your resources slipping away. When Saul felt that time was running out, his impatience caused him to act against God's will. When we are faced with a difficult decision, we must make sure that impatience does not drive us to do what is not in agreement with God's Word. When you know what God wants, do not go against that plan regardless of circumstances. God often uses delays to test our obedience and patience.

In Genesis 8:15, Noah occasionally tested the earth to see if it was dry, but he did not leave the ark until God told him to. He was waiting for God's timing. God knew that even though the water was gone, the earth was not dry enough for Noah and his family to venture out.

What patience Noah showed, especially after spending an entire year inside his boat! We, like Noah, must trust God to give us patience during those difficult times when we must wait. James 1:3 says, "The trying of your faith works patience." The trials and problems that we go through will build patience and spiritual strength in us, just like physical exercise builds physical strength.

The path to salvation can be found in Matthew 7:13-14. The gateway to eternal life is called straight and narrow. This does not mean it is difficult to become a Christian. It means that there are many ways to lead your life, but only one way to live eternally with God. Believing in Jesus is the only way to Heaven because He alone died for our sins and made us right before God. Living His way may not be easy, but it is the true and right way.

In I John, we find the steps of salvation and proof of salvation.

I John 1:8-10 — Confess our sin

I John 2:3 — We obey God’s commands

I John 2:23 — We acknowledge Jesus to be God’s Son

I John 3:9 — We do not practice sin

I John 3:14-19 — We show compassion to others

I John 4:8 — We must love each other

Within these words of God are wisdom. I am only the one who delivers them to you. If we will keep these simple guidelines with us, at one time or another, they will help us. I pray for you, and may God perform a miracle and release you from this bondage.

God bless each of you,

Blackjack Mulligan

THE END

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